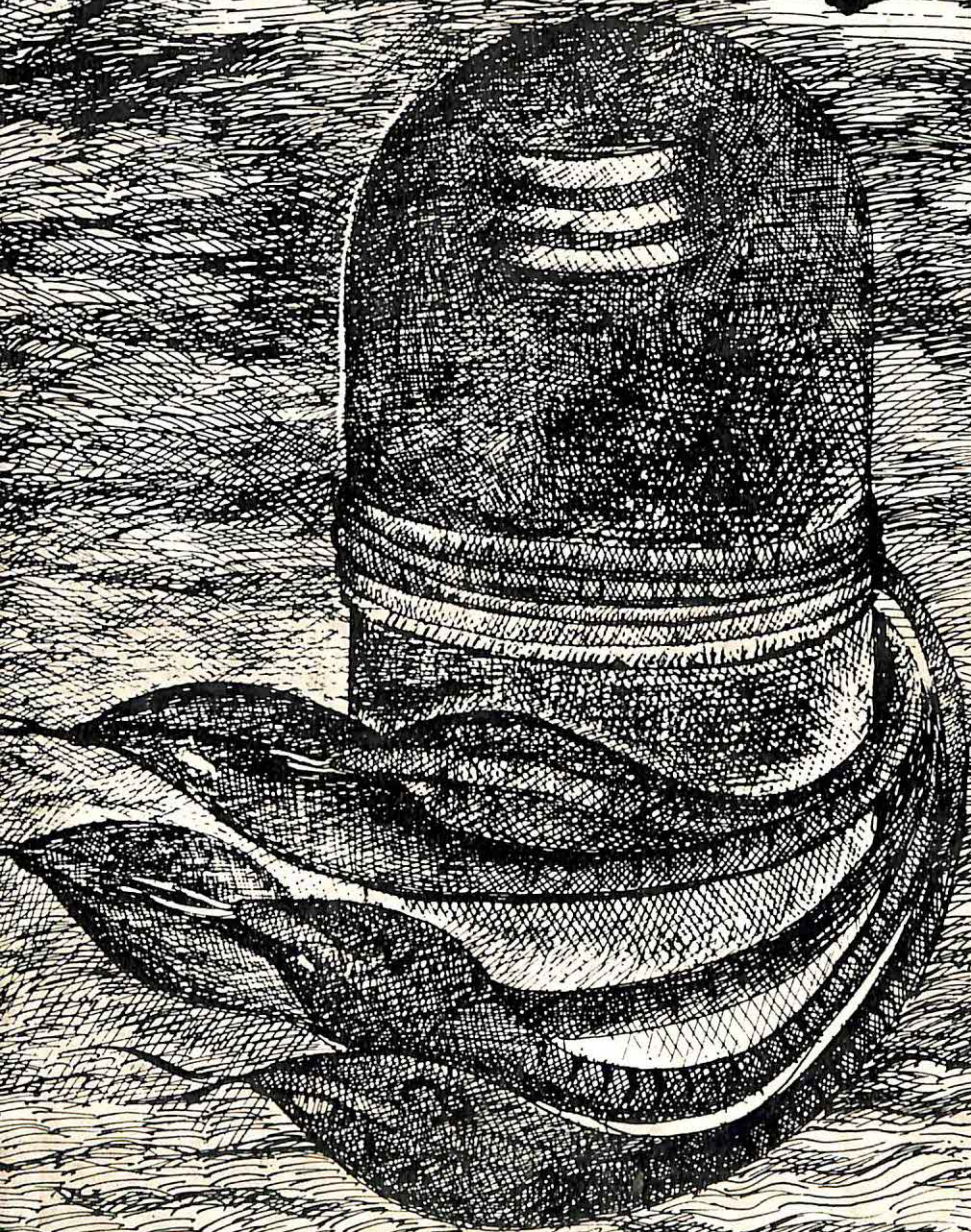


THE LORD OF THE
MEETING RIVERS
Devotional Poems of Basavaṇṇa

Translated by
K.V. ZVELEBIL



Basava or Basavaṇṇa as he is affectionately known to the Virāṣaivas of Karnataka lived in the twelfth century, and, although most probably not the founder of the Liṅgāyata (or Virāṣaiva) religion, he most certainly was its greatest exponent and one of its greatest poets. However, many of the hundreds of *Vacanas* which he composed must be considered world's classics of very high literary and philosophical value, with a message valid even for our days, not only in India, but universally. Some of the imagery of the poems is as striking as the modernity and vigour of Basava's social thought and the depth of his mystical experience. The present volume contains a representative sample of about 1200 *vacanas* ascribed to the poet and is a valuable contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of Kannada literature which has not received, among Western and Indian readers the interest and affection due to it.

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Devotional Poems of Basavanna

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND

POSTSCRIPT BY

K. V. ZVELEBIL



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Śrī Basavaṅgāya Namaḥ

Yatra jivaḥ tatra Śivaḥ
Where life is, Śiva is (804)

Whichever way you look
and see a creeper—Basavaṅga!

You pick it up and behold,
a cluster—the Liṅga!

Pick up the cluster, and, Oh,
the juice that brims in it!

ALLAMA PRABHU

Foreword

Vīraśaivism, which may be described as revived, regenerated and revolutionary Śaivism, is the religion of a Hindu community numbering about seven million, mostly in the Kannaḍa-speaking state of Karnāṭaka in South India where they constitute about 21 per cent of the total population. The term Vīraśaiva means 'militant, heroic Śaiva'; they are also called Līṅgāyatas, that is those who wear the Līṅga, an emblem and symbol of god Śiva.

The religious, spiritual, philosophical, cultural and political importance of these 'strict Śaiva-devotees' is much greater than the numbers above would indicate. Since about A.D. 1160 when in all probability Līṅgāyatism as we know it today originated as the result of the activities of Basavaṇṇa, the Vīraśaivas have been the most popular and powerful political and social force in Mysore-Karnāṭaka. There are also Līṅgāyata communities elsewhere in India.

Although the Vīraśaivas have abandoned and rejected many tenets—especially in the social field—of normative, traditional Hinduism, they have remained well within the basic framework of Hindu religion and philosophy. Their main writings are in Kannaḍa, a Dravidian language spoken today by about twenty-seven million people, and they are called *vacanas* (literally 'sayings, utterances'). Over 450 *vacana*-writers are known to date. One of the earliest among them, and certainly the most popular and influential, is Basava or Basavaṇṇa ('elder brother Basava'), also called Basaveśvara ('the lord Basava') (A.D. 1105-1167), who composed at least 1400 of these prose-poems.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted in a special way to one institution and two individuals. The institution is the Annana Balaga ('Circle of Basavaṇṇa') at Sirigere, Chitradurga Taluk, Karnāṭaka, which has supplied me readily and unhesitatingly with a few valuable publications that were needed for this work.

The individuals to whom I owe very special thanks are Professor A.K. Ramanujan, my former colleague at the University of Chicago, and His Holiness Śrī Dr. Taralabalu Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamiji, the present head of the Viraśaiva maṭha at Sirigere.

A.K. Ramanujan's lovely volume, *Speaking of Siva* (first edition, 1973), containing unsurpassed translations of the poems of four *vacanakāras*, was a source of constant joy and inspiration to me. Without this excellent book my own translations of Basava's *vacanas* would not even have been conceived.

To Dr. Shivamurthy Shivacharya Mahaswamiji I owe my heart-felt gratitude for his kind, ready, and timely advice on matters of Viraśaiva doctrine, as well as on my translations. Even though I have not always accepted his emendations, his remarks and his encouragement have always been one of the main stimuli during my work. I wish to express here my sincerest thanks for his guidance.

My thanks are also due to Moēnis Taha-Hussein of the UNESCO for his support and patience.

I am very grateful to the printers and the publisher for their excellent work, performed with so much skill and such generous forbearance.

* * *

The decades immediately after the Second World War were characterized by relentless 'materialism' in the sense of the pursuit of gratifications long deferred. They were followed by a period, in which we still live, which is in the shadow of a threefold threat that could have developed into a blessing for humanity but has instead pushed us to the verge of catastrophe: nuclear fission, gene-splicing and other gene-manipulations, and the so-called 'smart machines'. There is a quickening sense that mankind is made for something finer and needs fixity in fundamental beliefs. 'As the West sleepwalks into a decade in which moral confidence and steadfastness will be increasingly needed and decreasingly found' (George F. Will), it becomes fascinating to investigate, study and turn to communities which still have a core of settled convictions, which are determined to endure, and which nurture, defend and transmit their convictions within the framework of an authentic tradition. One of such communities is the Indian, Hindu community of the Viraśaivas or Liṅgāyatas, with whose writings this volume is concerned.

KAMIL V. ZVELEBIL

1 May 1984

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Accounts of the Liṅga

THREE VĪRAŚAIVA LEGENDS

Again and again, on the following pages, in the poems as well as in the prose passages, the word Liṅga will appear with continued persistency. This word denotes a crucial concept in Vīraśaivism, and is in fact the key-word in the Liṅgāyāta attempt at reaching out to the divine. Liṅga, in Vīraśaivism, stands for god, who is the Lord Śiva, or, more precisely, for the perennial symbol of Śiva, a symbol which is a compromise between form and formlessness.

The following Vīraśaiva legends introduce the reader to the Liṅga as it had appeared in its magnificent divine form at Arunachala; in its intimate shape as the object of devotion in the palm of the hand of Allama Prabhu, the most enigmatic but probably the most profound of all *vacana* poets writing in Kannaḍa; and in the form of the personal god of the poet of this volume, Basava.

THE LORD OF FIERY HILL

Nandi said:

“That is the holy place! Of all Aruṇācala is the most sacred! It is the heart of the world! Know it to be the secret and sacred Heart-centre of Śiva! In that place He always abides as the glorious Aruṇa Hill!”

Once the sages asked: “How did Liṅga originate? What is the Liṅga? How should the Lord be worshipped in this Liṅga?” Brahmā answered: “O excellent devas and sages, it was for us both—Viṣṇu and myself—that Liṅga manifested itself. It was when the

period of sustenance ceased and the creation was withdrawn and when at the end of a thousand sets of four *yugas* all immobile beings had dried up due to all-round drought, and other beings like men, animals, *rākṣasas*, *gandharvas*, including plant life were scorched to death by the rays of the Sun. Everything was a single vast sheet of water. It was terribly dark all round. In that vast sheet of water, the lord with the thousand heads, thousand eyes, thousand feet and thousand arms had gone to sleep. He, the omnipresent and supreme lord, who was white and black, pure, of huge arms, the soul of all, omniscient, the source and origin of all, went to sleep. On seeing the lotus-eyed deity lying thus, I was deluded by his *Māyā*. I asked him angrily: "Who are you? Tell me!" Then with my hand I raised up the eternal lord. Due to the firm blow of my hand he woke up from sleep and sat on his serpent couch. Within a moment he regained control of himself and with his lotus-like bleary eyes he looked at me. Enveloped by a halo of brilliance, he got up from his serpent couch, and, laughing, addressed me sweetly.

"I welcome you, O dear *Brahmā*!"

When I heard his words uttered smilingly my arrogance had been provoked and I spoke to him thus: "With smiles within, you call me Dear as if I were inferior to you. But know that I am the cause of creation and annihilation of the universe. You address me as a preceptor would address his disciple. But I am the eternal, unborn *Brahmā*, the origin and soul of the universe. I am the lotus-eyed lord. Now tell me quickly why you speak thus in utter delusion!"

He then replied to me: "See for yourself that I am the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the universe. You are born of my eternal body. You forget that I am the lord of the universe, *Viṣṇu*, the origin, the supreme soul. Listen to the truth, O four-faced deity. There is no other lord like me. I alone am the Supreme Brahman. I am the greatest principle. Whatever is seen or heard in this universe, the mobile and immobile, is identical with me and permeated by me. Out of my joy and sport you were born as also the Cosmos."

As soon as he finished his speech, a terrible, thrilling fight ens-

ued between us. In the middle of that dark ocean of dissolution we were engaged in fight, instigated by pride and fury.

Suddenly, a brilliant shaft of light appeared like a fiery mountain in front of us, to suppress our dispute and enlighten us. It had thousands of clusters of flames. It was stable, with no decline or increase. It had neither a beginning nor an end nor a middle. It was incomparable, inexplicable, and indistinct. It was the source of the universe.

Lord Viṣṇu was deluded by its thousand flames. I too was dazed. Then Viṣṇu said to me: "Let us test this fiery Being. I shall go to the root of this incomparable column of fire. You should go up, to its summit."

After saying this, Viṣṇu assumed the form of a huge boar. And I, O devas, I assumed the form of a large swan. Ever since they call me the Cosmic Swan.

I assumed the form of a swan of white, bright colour, with red, fiery eyes and dazzling feathers. As fast as wind, as fast as the mind, I went higher and higher. Viṣṇu the All-pervading assumed the form of a huge black Boar and went lower and lower. Its body was enormous like Mount Meru. It had white, curved teeth, the refulgence of all-consuming sun, its body was firm and vast like a heap of blue collyrium, and it had a long snout and a loud and terrifying grunt. Viṣṇu the Dark Boar went lower and lower, hurriedly, for a period of one thousand years.

Still he could not reach the root of the Fiery Liṅga. During that period of time, I was going higher and higher. I was tired. But with all my efforts I could not see the top of that Liṅga. I returned. Similarly, Lord Viṣṇu was also tired. I could see the fear in his eyes. Dejected, he stood there, beaten. I lost my arrogance. We bowed to the Fiery Liṅga. We bowed behind and in front and at the sides, and wondered what that was.

O great devas! Then a loud sound 'Ōm' issued out of the column. It was a sound like the disc of the Sun, refulgent as fire, splendid like the Moon. And the Mount of Fire was the Lord Śiva pure as crystal, unique, void, both without and within, devoid of beginning, middle and end, the source of all the cause of bliss, Lord Aruṇācaleśvara, the God of Aruṇagiri, the Mountain of Light, the Tejoliṅga.

THE LORD OF CAVES

In the town of Baḷḷigāve, in the Chālukya Kingdom where the people speak the Kannaḍa language, lived a dance-teacher called Sujñāni ('The Wise One') with his wife Nirahankāra ('Selflessness'). Although they were god-fearing and devout worshippers of Śiva, they were for a long time childless. Thus, they undertook penance for a son, and, indeed, one day they found a shining child by their side. They called the boy Allama, and the father in agreement with the rules of their caste, taught his son sacred music. Allama became a talented temple-drummer.

One day he noticed, among the *devadāsīs*, the maiden temple-dancers, a lovely one whose name was Kāmalate ('Love's Tender'). He fell in love with her, and his affection and passion was reciprocated. Their love was without end, beginning, or middle. Drowned in desire, it knew no weight or impediment.

One day, however, Kāmalate was suddenly stricken down by a fever and died. Allama, more dead than alive with terror and sorrow, left his home and wandered in his grief from place to place, like a madman, benumbed, his memory failing, his heart broken, calling out for the dead Kāmalate, in forest, field and town.

One day he was sitting in a deserted grove. He was a beggar now, in tattered rags, a wandering madman, roaming the countryside aimlessly. That day, tired, thirsty, hungry, scorched by sun and painful memories, he sat down in the shade of an out-of-town grove, and was scratching the ground thoughtlessly with his toenail. Suddenly he saw something: a golden pinnacle, the small cupola (*kalaśa*) of a temple, jutting forth from the earth, like the 'nipple-peak on the breast' of a Goddess. He started to dig furiously, tearing his nails and hurting his fingers; when, finally, with the help of tree-branches and stones, hands bleeding, he got the place dug and excavated, a small shrine stood in front of him, with its door closed—an underground shrine, full of mystery.

Unmindful of the consequences, Allama kicked the door open and entered.

In the darkness of the shrine he saw a Yogī sitting in trance, in the heart of the underground temple, concentrated on the Liṅga which glowed like an emerald in his hand. The eyes and the face

of the Yogī were shining with red light, his hair was ablaze, a garland of *rudrākṣa* beads round his neck, serpent earrings in his ears. The Yogī's name was Animiṣayya ('The Open-eyed One'). While Allama stood there astonished, the Yogī placed into his hand the dazzling, brilliant Liṅga, and in that moment, his life went out. In that very moment, too, as the Liṅga was transferred from the hand of the Yogī into the palm of Allama's hand, Allama became enlightened, and, in one instant, knew and saw.

"Deva!" spoke Allama, addressing the glowing Liṅga in his hand.

"Deva! You are in mountains,
in caves, in valleys,
in pastures and fields.
Wherever we cast our eyes,
there you are, Deva.

Inaccessible to the mind, beyond perception,
here, there, everywhere
you are, O Lord!
O Lord of caves,
I have seen!
The spinning whirlpool of your Mind
is impenetrable!"

Henceforth, Allama wandered where the Lord called him. Thus he came to Kalyāṇa, the capital of the kingdom. There he found a group of saints and poets who at once accepted him as their Master, and called him Prabhu. Basavaṇṇa was there, the all-powerful minister and treasurer of the King, who was, at the same time, the moving spirit of the new community of 'heroic Śaivites'; Akka Mahādevī the woman-saint, passionate, wild-looking, wandering about, clad only in her tresses; Cennabasava, brilliant, learned and influential, the obvious successor to his uncle Basavaṇṇa as the leader of the movement; Siddharāma, a famous poet in the Kannaḍa language; Gogārāya, Muktāi, and others. To all these Vīraśaivas Allama Prabhudēva imparted his spiritual lore, and was elected president of the Anubhavamāṇṭapa ('Hall of Experience'), an assembly established by Basava. He also became head of the Viraktamaṭha in Kalyāṇa, the monastery of

the order of the red-garbed monks, and he occupied the Śūnyasiṃhāsana, the pontifical seat known as the Throne of Void. He was known as a man of vast learning, deep thinking, profound vision, and striking poetic talent.

However, he has never forgotten the unique experience he had when he had met the mysterious Yogī: this experience of the secret underground, of the cave-temple, found expression in the name Guheśvara or the Lord of Caves which appears as a signature-line in almost all of Allama's poems.

Like fire inside the rock,
like the disc of the Sun reflected in water,
like the tree within the seed,
like Silence within sound,
O Lord of Caves,
is the shelter of your love.

THE LORD OF THE MEETING RIVERS

There lived at Ingaḷēśvara Bāgēvāḍi in the Karnāṭaka country a pious Brahmin and a devout Śaivite by name of Maṇḍageya Mādirāja. As he had no issue, Mādirāja's wife Mādāmbike observed the vow of Nandikēśvara Basava and was favoured with a son. At the birth of the child, God Śiva-Sangamēśvara of Kūḍala, "The Lord of the Meeting Rivers", appeared in the garb of a holy man to bless the baby. The child was named Basava which signifies Śiva's Bull.

The boy learnt in no time reading, writing, arithmetic, poetry, grammar, the Vedas, the Āgamas and the Purāṇas, and when he attained his eighth year, Mādirāja made preparations to celebrate his *upanayana*—the investiture of the boy with the holy Brahmin thread.

Since early childhood, Basava has been devoted to Śiva. However, already as a boy he argued with Mādirāja against the Brahminical initiation. Even as a boy he found the caste-system of his society and the ritualism of his home senseless and oppressive. Finally, he revolted. By the time he was sixteen, he denounced his father and mother, proclaiming that his real parents were Śiva's devotees, and he left the house accompanied by his sister Nāgām-

bike. He tore off his sacred thread, and, disregarding wealth and propriety, thinking nothing of his family and relatives, he left Bāgēvādi, went eastwards, and entered Kappaḍi Sangama, the place "where two rivers meet".

Kappaḍi or Kūḍala Sangama ("The Confluence of Rivers") was a place renowned as a great sacred site, visited by thousands of pilgrims all round the year. It was an eminent religious centre renowned for its sanctity and scholarship. The temple of Śiva-Saṅgamēśvara or, as he was also called, of Kūḍala Sangamadēva, "The Lord of Confluence" was erected on the brow of the meeting of two big rivers, Kṛṣṇā and Malaprabhā.

There Basava came to find his chosen god, the Lord of the Meeting Rivers. As soon as he arrived at Kappaḍi Sangama, Lord Saṅgamēśvara again appeared in the form of a Śaiva mendicant, lifted and embraced Basava who lay prostrate at his feet, blessed him with his divine grace, and sent him a Guru, by name of Īśānya, with whom Basava studied the Śivapurāṇa, the Liṅgapurāṇa, the Skandapurāṇa and many other scriptures.

Thus Basava spent twelve years at Sangama, worshipping the Lord as *sthāvara liṅga*, the Immovable Liṅga installed in the large white temple, in the midst of the assembly of devotees, studying and singing the glory of his divine Master. But one day, the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Son, Basavaṇṇa ('Brother Basava'), we want to raise you in the world; therefore, go where King Bijjaḷa reigns". Basavaṇṇa woke up and found it unbearable to leave the temple and his Lord. However, Śiva visited him again in a dream and told him that next day he would appear to him through the mouth of his Sacred Bull. Next day, while Basavaṇṇa waited, leaning his body against the stone Nandī ('Bull') in the temple, the Lord formed a Liṅga in the heart-lotus of the Bull, and, enthroned on the Bull's tongue, came into Basavaṇṇa's hand, and initiated him. Basavaṇṇa burst out into speech saying:

"Your wideness is the wideness of the world,
the wideness of the firmament,
and wider still.

Your feet go deeper than the underworld,
Your crown is higher than the universe,

You, Liṅga, who are imperceptible,
past understanding, unlimited,
incomparable.
But coming to the hollow of my hand
you shrink to almost nothing,
light and minkin,
O Lord of Confluence!"

From then on, Basavaṇṇa was freed from places; from then on, he had no need to worship the Immovable Liṅga in the temple, for he carried his God, the *iṣṭaliṅga*—his chosen, personal Śiva-liṅga—along on his body. He left Kappaḍi Saṅgama, prepared to create a society of Śiva's men.

Introduction

This is a book of *vacanas*—religious lyrics in free verse, composed originally in the Kannaḍa language.

Kannaḍa is a Dravidian language, spoken today in the south Indian state of Karnāṭaka by about 27 million people. The recorded history of Kannaḍa literature begins from the ninth century, but there is evidence for at least fifteen centuries of literary activities in the Kannaḍa language.

The *vacanas* (lit. 'sayings, things said'), these short compositions in poetic prose, became the literary medium of the medieval Vira-śaiva (Līṅgāyata) saints. Basava, together with Allama Prabhu, Mahādēviyakka and a few others, belongs to the group representing the greatest poets of the *vacana* tradition. There were about four hundred and fifty *vacanakāras*; the number of *vacanas* which have so far been printed and edited may exceed twelve thousand. But more and more *vacanas* are being discovered every year with the discovery of new manuscripts.

Basava or Basavaṇṇa, also called Basaveśvara (A.D. 1105-1167) was not the first to compose *vacanas*. Dēvara Dāsimayya or 'God's Dāsimayya', who lived during the middle of the eleventh century or even earlier, has composed *vacanas* of high literary value and may be the first known *vacanakāra*.

Though *vacanas* are not, strictly speaking, verse, it is possible to arrange them according to certain patterns in lines of varying length, and they certainly exhibit structure. A *vacana* can run from three to thirty or more lines—there is no restriction as to

the number of lines. Usually, each *vacana* ends in an *ankita*—a mark or sign which the author weaves into the text of his composition to suggest his authorship. The *ankita* of Basava is *Kūḍala-saṅgamadēva* 'The Lord of Confluence'—the name of his beloved god.

Vacanas were supposed to be uttered or sung on the spur of the moment, on the spot, here and now. They were the reflection of spontaneous experience—the poets' varied experience of nature, life and religion. Earlier in Kannaḍa literature, poets composed long narratives with mythical stories for their themes. Basava and his contemporaries introduced for the first time lyricism into Kannaḍa poetry.

No metrical line or stanza is used in the *vacanas*. The *vacana-kāras* did not think of themselves as poets; they did not follow any models. Their compositions have the spontaneity of free verse; they are—to use the very happy formulation of A. K. Ramanujan—'a literature in spite of itself'.

However, as stressed above, the *vacanas* exhibit a distinctive structure. Their metre is not syllabic but 'syntactic'; there are regularities, parallelisms, repetitions, paired opposites, contrastive patterns, recurring formulae, and regular signature-lines. These regularities are usually units of syntax and semantics. The patterns and symmetries of *vacanas* belong to the sphere of oral poetics.

These prose-poems were often sung to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Many earlier writers have termed *vacanas* 'songs' (*gīta*), and these 'songs' were often set to music: thus, e.g. Rāghavāṅka, one of the medieval poets, tells us that the *vacanas* of Siddharāma (c. A.D. 1160) were sung by his disciples in *śuddha bhairavī rāga*. Allama is said to have wandered from place to place singing his 'songs' and playing upon a lyre called *daṇḍige*. Today, too, *vacanas* are usually sung; unfortunately, more often than not they are not sung in the classical manner but set to fashionable film-music.

Kallumaṭhada Prabhudēva (A.D. 1430), who wrote a commentary on the *vacanas*, defines them aptly as 'the spontaneous overflow of the experience of mystic happiness' (*śivasukha*). The oral origins and qualities of this poetry are manifested again and again.

However, there are also esoteric *vacanas* (*beḍagina vacana*), cryptic, full of riddles and paradoxes, with entire occult glossaries of their own. These are extremely rare in Basava's poetry, but quite frequent, e.g. in the compositions of Allama or Siddharāma.

The number of *vacanas* composed by Basava and discovered so far will be over 1400. A few are didactic in nature; some are dedicated exclusively to sharp social criticism; quite a number of them express Basava's inner conflicts and his mystic experience, and show him as sensitive and highly emotional, a keen observer of life and nature, and, above all, a powerful poet. There are *vacanas* among his compositions which lack completely true literary greatness; but their number is small. What are the characteristic features of Basava's poems when compared to those of other *vacanakāras*?

There is a relative simplicity, and definitely a striking spontaneity and directness typical for Basava's *vacanas*. Nevertheless, there is also freshness and originality of images, and, from time to time, the expression of rare poetic vision and beauty. The political activist and the social reformer speaks frequently with louder voice than the mystic and the saint. There are, also, quite a few allusions to older Śaiva traditions, e.g. to some of the sixty-three Tamil saints (*nāyanmārs*) whom Viraśaivas regard as their forebears. There is the visible presence of the doctrine of work as worship (*kāyakavē kailāsa* 'work is heaven') which is very probably Basava's own contribution to Viraśaiva philosophy; but only very few of his *vacanas* are doctrinary. There is a definite almost fanatical monotheism and a certain intolerant evangelism. Basava's poems reflect in their more personal tones the fundamental antagonism within his personality: the paradox of a saint and a politician; the strange phenomenon of one playing the role of the other. Basava, with his zest of a social reformer and the zeal of a prophet, caught in the net of practical politics, was not a perfect being but a man whose whole life was a struggle towards self-perfection. This struggle is strongly present in his poetry. But, above all, there is a very characteristic mixture of harshness and tenderness; of almost rude assertiveness and extreme loving-kindness. This makes him so human, so near, so lovable.

Basavaṇṇa's *vacanas* have been arranged according to the six-

phase (*saṭsthala*) system into six large groups: *bhakta* 'affective', *māhēśvara* 'conative', *prasādi* 'cognitive', *prāṇaliṅgi* 'intuitive', *śaraṇa* 'executive', *aikya* 'unitive' (cf. Postscript). I, too, follow in my arrangement of the translated *vacanas* this traditional system. The fact that most of the translated poems come under the first phase of *bhakta sthala* is not due to any personal whim of my selection but reflects the actual state of affairs, obviously typical for Basava: nearly half of his *vacanas* belong to this first phase of a man struggling with the world and its temptations to achieve true *bhakti*, true devotion and, ultimately, the unmediated vision and union with the 'self-subsisting All-Void', the 'ineffable Supreme Thing' (Tōṇṭada Siddhalingēśvara).

In the numbering and the order of Basava's *vacanas* I have used the edition prepared by Dr. R.C. Hiremath (Karnatak University, Dharwar, 1968).

I hope that the present volume will sweep away such silly statements like the following found, amazingly, in E. P. Rice's *A History of Kanarese Literature* (p. 108): '... Kanarese writers... have as yet contributed extremely little to the stock of the world's knowledge and inspiration.'

The Kannaḍa *vacanas*, and, in particular, Basavaṇṇa's poems, are strikingly original and impassioned witnesses of a powerful protest-movement, and of deep, universally valid wisdom and religious experience.

Bhakta Sthala
(Devotion)

1

It's like the fire of desire
hidden in water
Like the flavour of the sap
in the tender plant
Like the sweet perfume
within the bud

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers
it's like a maiden's love

Strong is the elephant. But could you say:
Less strong the goad?
No, no, not so!

Strong is the mountain. But could you say:
Less strong the thunderbolt?
No, no, not so!

Strong is the darkness. But could you say:
Less strong the light?
No, no, not so!

Strong is oblivion. But could you say:
Less strong the heart that loves you

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

How could you feast on dainties
when impaled on stake?

The many-coloured course of existence
is like the friendship
of a snake towards a snake-charmer.

Once self is enemy to self,
what chance is there of peace and harmony,

O you great giver, Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

To give me birth, Māyā bore me—as mother.
To delight me, Māyā was born—as my daughter.
To embrace me, Māyā shared my bed—as my wife.
So many different ways she has,
Māyā,
to worry and trouble me!
Not in my power to unhinge this Māyā!
And you
are amused,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

A trooper is able enough
to ride a horse
if all he has to do
is to hold a shade:
A billion umbrellas!
Only a dozen brave!

When an elephant comes
and takes its stand
in front of a moonstone hill,
look at the prowess of the foes
to strike and slay!

A doll's shape out of a potter's kiln,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
is now your nameless name!

One can stand still where a hearth burnt:
But could you stand where burnt the earth?

When the bank, thirsty, drinks the stream,
and the fence turns around to graze,
when the wife turns to thievish ways,
and mother's milk to poison's cream,
when all seems part of a mad dream—

to whom should I turn, Lord,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

My life is like a dog
licking a sword's sharp blade
for the taste of *ghī*!

My mind will not forsake
this whirling world.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
let me be ridden of this doggish life
by your grace!

They have worn me out—my strong and unruly
five senses.

They raped my sanity—the passions of my mind.

They broke my courage—the passions of my flesh.

And I surrender

to you

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Plant me, a paltry parrot, firmly upon the hill of
mankind

and teach me, Lord, to cry: O Śiva, Śiva!

Inclose me, shut me in devotion's cage,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Make me, O Lord, O Father, a crippled man
who will not wander here and there.

Make me, O Lord, O Father, a sightless man
whose glances will not rove astray.

Make me, O Lord, O Father, an earless man
who will not listen to rubbish and jests.

Keep me from all enticements free
so that the stronghold of your feet
will be my solitary quest,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Let them not say, O Lord,

“Whose man, whose man, whose man is this?”
Let them say, “This man is mine, this man is mine,
this man is mine !”

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
make me feel I'm a son
of your house,
O Lord!

To conquer the sins that bind me to this existence
won't it be enough to say:

“Om nama Śivāya, to you I bow?”

I keep on saying, “Hara, Hara,
Śankara, Śiva, Śiva, Śankara,
hail, O hail, Śankara, to you I bow!”

My bondage is gone. I keep on saying:

“O Lord of the Meeting Rivers, to you I bow.”

The master of the house, is he at home, or is he out?

Upon the threshold sprouts the grass,

in the house, there is dirt and dust:

the master of the house, is he at home, or is he out?

Within the body, heaps of lies,

and in the heart, abundant lust:

no, the master of the house is not at home,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Can the pan taste the pounded rice?
The monkey enjoy a swinging couch?
Can a crow perched on Indra's bower
become a cuckoo? Listen!
Can a crane sitting near the water's edge
become a royal swan,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

However long a stone will soak in water
can it grow soft?

However long I spend in worship
doesn't my heart remain fickle?

Futile like a ghost
guarding a treasure trove
am I,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

When a whore with a child
takes for the lust of gold a customer,
she's neither for the child nor for the lecher.
One moment she'll pet the child;
the next she'll go and lie with the lecher.

Love of money is relentless,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

A snake-charmer with his noseless wife,
a snake in his hand,
walks trying to read omens
for their son's wedding.

They meet another snake-charmer
and his noseless wife
and shout: "The omens are bad!"

Now what a clever chap!
His own wife has no nose,
in his own hand a snake.

What shall I call such fools
who do not see themselves
and point to another's faults?

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

U. S. N. S. W. S. ASHRAH
Date 8.7.03
Lib. No. 10705



Her speech is like dark sugar:

but I have seen, O Lord, strong poison in her heart!

She will invite one lover with her eyes;

another man is hidden in her heart !

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers, listen, Lord,

one must not trust the woman—thief of men!

I went to fornicate—
and almost choked with cough.

I went behind a ruined wall;
a scorpion stung me there.

The watchman who heard me scream
robbed me of my clothes.

I went home in shame,
my husband raised weals on my back.

The king, Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
collected his fine!

If you strike an anthill
will the snake die?
What if you perform
the severest penance?
Will the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
have trust in those
who are not pure of heart?

See-saw watermills bend their heads.
So what?
Do they become devotees of the Master?

The pincers fold their hands.
So what?
Do they become servants of the Lord?

Parrots recite.
So what?
Do they become theologians?

How can the votaries of the Bodiless God
know the ways of our Lord's Men,
how can they know the worth
of the Men of our Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

A worship without love! A work without attachment!

Such worship and such work—

behold, my brother:

pictured loveliness.

Behold, my brother:

painted sugarcane.

No joy in its embrace! No relish in its taste!

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,

there's no devotion

without naked truth.

After the coronation,
why search for the royal signs?

After the worship of the Linga,
why ask for a person's rank?

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers has said:
"A devotee's body is my body."

What is called the world of gods,
what is called the world of mortals,
are these some other strange worlds?

In this very world
there are other infinite worlds.

Where Śiva's works are done,
there is the world of Śiva.
Where a devotee stays,
there is the world of gods.

The devotee's courtyard is Benares.
His body is Kailāsa.
This is a fact,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

The crookedness of the snake
is straight enough for the anthill.

The crookedness of the river
is straight enough for the sea.

The crookedness of the Lord's men
of the Meeting Rivers is straight enough
for our god of the Linga.

Do not draw near to God
presuming he is kind:

Can he be kind who broke you on the rack?

Can he be kind who makes you weep and laugh?

But if you slave for him
without alarm and fright,
he will abandon himself
for your sake,
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

The mind is the snake; the body is the basket:
they live together, the snake and the basket.
You don't know, though, when it may kill you;
you don't know when it will bite!
If I can worship you day after day,
that is the charm against poison,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Don't search along the beaten paths.

Bring nothing for a price.

Say once, and lovingly:

“Śiva's my stronghold and protection.”

Say but one word—and it is yours:

freedom and liberation.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers is a lustful woman
greedy for piety.

O brothers,
You who gaze into mirrors,
look at the Moving ones;
for in the Jangamas—the Moving ones,
Lord Linga made his house.

“The Immovable and the Movable are one”,
so says the vacana,
the Utterance,
of the Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Having worshipped the Linga
you must pay homage to the Moving one.

Do not be stiff
like one who has swallowed a stake.

But if you bend
like a bunch of plantains grown big and heavy,

the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
will grant you all the strength you ask.

Seeing a snake of stone they say:
"Pour milk for it!"

Seeing a real snake they will scream:
"Kill it!"

If a Jangama who can eat arrives they'll say:
"Be gone!"

They'll serve their dainties to a Linga
that cannot eat!

If you show no respect to our men,
to the men of the Meeting Rivers,
you'll be like clods
knocking against a stone!

Giving your body, you should endear yourself to
the Guru;
giving your heart, you should endear yourself to
the Linga;
giving your wealth, you should endear yourself to
the Jangama.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers
loves not
those who have abandoned these three
and beat hard the big drum
and worship a mere sign.

What if you dance,
and sing,
and recite—

and yet are empty
of the triple dedication?

Does not the peacock dance?

Does not the string sing?

Does not the parrot recite?

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers
rejects
the undevout.

Can there be devotion
in words and more words?

Can there be devotion
unless the body is spent,
unless the heart is spent,
unless the wealth is spent?

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers
plays tricks with you
until your bones stick out:

Can there be devotion
unless you stand his play?

You can't just do
this thing called bhakti.

Like a saw it cuts when it goes,
it cuts when it comes.
Place your hand in a pitcher
with a hooded snake:
won't it bite,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

You may perform your drill
with a forked stick:
you cannot fight with it
on the battlefield.

Why talk in flowery words
like a goldsmith?

If you know the right time
and don't mask what's inside you,
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
will love you, will foster you,
will take care.

The bamboo bends to a palanquin pole,
the bamboo stands for a sun-shade stick,
the bamboo's used for a New Year's day pole
as well as for the post of a tent,
the bamboo can be all your wealth.

Our Lord of the Meeting Rivers
dislikes
those who do *not* bend.

Those who forget
the throngs of Rudra of the Doomsday Fire—
they are the ones who say
“Grain !” and “Split pulse !”

Like jackals howling when the forest fire
grows beyond bounds
these people stay among the heaps of men.

The piety of one who does it for display
not knowing that such love
is but a momentaneous whim
is like a sunshade
held at night.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

If the thought 'I did well' flashes into my mind,
the drum of Śiva haunts me with its piercing sound!

Will you brag, 'I did it for the Linga?'
Will you boast, 'I did it for the Jangama?'

Only if there's no trace of the thought within my
mind
of what I've done
will that which I desire be yours,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

You shall not steal nor kill
You shall not speak a lie nor angry be
You shall not scorn another man
You shall not yourself glorify
Nor other ridicule

This indeed is your inward purity
This indeed is your outward purity
This indeed is the way to win
Our Lord of the Meeting Rivers'
Love

Melt my mind, O Lord,
and purge its stains.

Test it on the touchstone for its colour
and refine it in fire.

Cut it and beat it to pure shining gold
and hammer from it anklets

for the feet of your devotees.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

“O Śankari,
the highest substance
is a nameless name
revealed by the Vedas.

The Supreme Lord
is the Iṣṭalinga
revealed in the utterance
by the mantra of the Guru.”

As said above,
the sin of word, the vice of speech
have plagued and ruined me,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.
So, too, the egoism
saying “I”.

When those men
and these men
are prostrate at my feet
I grow and swell as if I am the lord
I burst and puff with pride

Set it on fire
that arrogance
and burn it borax-white
that fat conceit

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers

My hunger does not diminish

My lust does not cease

Attachments persist

And actions do not fade

I pour out the bath: my body is still foul

I pour out the bath: my soul is still ugly

I pour out the bath: I am not your man

I am not a bearer of Linga

In the Lord of the Meeting Rivers

I am but a ghost

As much as I know that you are God
 that much you know who am I
 I know not how to believe
 I know not how to make myself believed
 I know not how to love
 I know not how to make myself beloved
 "As the heart and mind
 so the Linga
 This is the truth
 The truth beyond a doubt
 As the devotion
 so the Fulfilment
 This is the truth
 The truth beyond a doubt"
 This being so as said
 Listen to me
 O Lord of the Meeting Rivers
 For billion upon billion years
 I have suffered pain

O heart, my heart
you have forgot the disgrace of your births!
Listen, my heart: believe in the Linga!
Listen, my heart: believe in Jangama!
Pursue incessantly
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
O my heart!

My mind, O Lord, is like a lizard
darting about a hedge.

My mind is a chameleon
appearing one thing each
several times.

My mind is like a flying fox.

Even as dawn which breaks at the large gate of the
town

for the blind man rising at the dead of night—
is there, for a mere wish, love without ego?

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Will they upon one fallen into a pit
roll down a mortar of stone?

Will they upon one handcuffed in stocks
place iron chains?

Will they scrape with a wire
a scalded wound?

Will anyone but Siriyāḷa endure
the torment inflicted by
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

Do not, O Lord, at every step
tap at my heart by way of test,
do not, O Lord, plague me
because I am a miserable waif.

I, too, have my masters:
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers' men.

There is no lesser man than I
There is none greater than Śiva's devotees
By the testimony of your feet
By the testimony of my mind
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers
This indeed is my trial

The son of the slave in Cannayya's house,
the daughter of the maid in Kakkayya's house,
those two went to the fields for dung
and fell together.

I'm the son born of these two.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers is my witness.

Like the child of a harlot

I, too, cannot say to anyone: Father!

Cannayya is my father.

Cannayya's son am I.

In the Great House

of the Lord of the Meeting Rivers

Basavaṇṇa, the treasurer,

is a child of charity.

My mother is Nimbavve: she's a water-carrier.
My father's Cannayya: he carries the king's
 weaponry.

You say I have no kin:
My sister cooks at Kānci!
You say I have no kin.

 Out of your hand I received,
 O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
 the devotion my ancestors
 have generated.

The devotee of Immovable knows the limit,
but where's the limit to the sovereign Linga Jangama?

The ocean has a limit
but where's a limit of a flowing stream?

The bhakta has a limit
but is there a limit to the Jangama,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

Does not a crow, on seeing a crumb,
call to its crowd?

Does not a hen, on seeing a morsel,
call clacking to all her brood?

If a man who is a Śivabhakta
lacks loyalty to his own faith,
he's a wrong-doer, and worse
than a crow or a hen,

O Lord of Confluence!

I do not know
whether I should say Yes or No
I do not know
whether *that* is the primal path
I do not know the truth
I do not know the real and inherent
nor any more the good and pure

I but subsist
on what your men have left behind

O Lord of Confluence

I take the water of your feet,
I take the offering that you have blest,
I say
My honour, life and wealth
are yours!

Will our Lord of the Meeting Rivers
love me for empty words—

even as a sinful prostitute
who takes her nightly fee?

Come, Lord,
and pour down
the nectar of your name
upon me, Father mine—
 until my heart bursts forth,
 until my mind is drenched,
 until my tongue reverberates with joy!
Let my heart like a blown bud rest
upon the flowers of your holy feet

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Feet will dance
and tire not
Eyes will see
and tire not
Tongue will sing
and tire not

What else What else
shall I do

I worship with full hands
the heart is not content

What else What else
shall I do

Listen O Lord

What I desire most
is to burst your belly
and enter you

O Lord of Confluence

I do not know what week it is
I do not know what is the date
I don't know anything O Lord
I do not know: Is it dark night
or is it sunny day
I don't know anything O Lord
I worship you: and I forget myself
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers

The infinite bliss of seeing you
The supreme bliss of loving you
I gaze at you Lord
with all my billion hairs transformed to eyes
O Lord God of the Meeting Rivers
gazing and gazing at you
as passion and delight were born in my heart
the marks of my love stood out

My speech is brimming with the nectar of Thy name

My eyes are brimming with Thy image

My ears are brimming with Thy fame

My mind is brimming with the thoughts of Thee

O Lord of Confluence

I am a bee

hid in the lotus of Thy feet

Again and again

I cling to Linga, feasting my eyes on Him,
and streams of tears of joy, O Lord,
flow from my eyes.

My body thrills, with hair on end.

The drops of sweat are all
like shapes of hailstone,
like a waxen doll.

What shall I say?

I burn to join my heart in love
by sight and touch
with my Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

I don't know anything of prosody,
of time-beat or of metre,
nor do I know the count of rhythm and of tone.

I don't know this variety of feet
or that.

O Lord of Confluence,
since nothing will offend you,
I shall sing to the tune
of love.

Make of my body, Lord, the pole;
Make of my head the gourd
And of my nerves the wires, O Lord,
The plectrum of my fingers make;
Intone your two-and-thirty notes
And press my heart and play,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

Let the whole world know: I've got a mate.

I'm a married woman

Married to one am I.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers
is my man.

I've got a mate.

Him, the golden-sandalled one
 Him of the reddish tresses reaching to his heels
 Him smeared all over with the sacred ash
 Him who holds in his hand the skull
 Him who has become half woman
 Him who guarded the door of Bāṇa
 Him who had played bawd for Nambi
 Him who poured rain of gold on the Chola
 Him who has entered my heart
 Him who dwells in the heart of true devotees
 Him who is within worship performed
 Him who is called

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers

What do you want to know, sir,
of the passions of devotion,
of pangs of absence,
joys of union?

Bashfulness, shame—
for the lover?

Dignity, humiliation—
for the one who loves?

What do you want to know, Sir,
about the mad and frenzied fool
who dotes upon
the men of the Lord of Confluence?

Upon the soil of Devotion sprouted Guru, the seed,
and Linga, the leaf, was born.

Upon the leaf of the Linga

Thought came for the flower,

Action came for the tender fruit,

Consummation came for the ripe fruit,

and when the fruit of Consummation broke loose and
fell

the Lord of the Meeting Rivers

wanting it for himself

gathered it up.

Māhēśvara
(*Discipline*)

532

Wherever I look there art thou, God!
Thou art, God, the shape of all surrounding space.
Thou art, God, the Universal Eye,
Thou art, God, the Universal Face,
Thou art, God, the Arms of All,
Thou art, God, the Feet of All,
O Lord of Confluence.

Earth shattered by the tramping of his feet
Stars scattered at the touch of his crown
His hand reached out and worlds fell upon worlds
Suddenly the Earth falters under divine tread.
The planets in the sky are bruised by his rotating
arms.

And higher than the firmament, the limits of the
universe are tickled by his hair.

When, for protection of the world, you dance!
Today, our Lord of the Meeting Rivers
Sports in his dance.

Do not boast.

There are no two or three gods.

Mark you, He is but One.

To speak of two is false.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers is the only God.

The Veda says: There are no two gods.

Shall I say Viṣṇu is great?

There is no end to his humiliations
right through the ten incarnations!

Shall I say Brahmā is great?

His head gone, what all he underwent!

Shall I say the Veda is great?

It praised and praised through different mouths
and yet did not see the Linga's ultimate nature.

Shall I say the Śāstra is great? Mere words!

Shall I say the Purāṇa is great? Mere old tales.

Shall I say the Āgama is great? It's gone and vanished.

Therefore, the Lord of the Meeting Rivers alone
is eternal.

All those lurking godlings, mark ye,
are ephemeral.

There are some gods
who always haunt the doors of people's homes.

There are some gods
who will not go if you ask them to go.

There are some gods
who are far worse than dogs.

What can they give, these gods,
who live of the charity of people,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers?

All those who live
 on deserted hills, on hamlet roads,
 in tanks and wells, flowering shrubs and trees,
 in heart of villages, where the roads meet, at gates
 of towns,
 in huge and ancient banyans,

who enter milking buffaloes,
 babies and pregnant women,
 fresh mothers, virgins, lads,
 who wander here and there,
 Mārayya, Birayya, the stupid Kēcara,
 spook and sylph, goblin, ghoul,
 Kālayya, Dūlayya, Mālayya, Kētayya—

for all these hundred pots
 there's one club
 and that's it:

“Our Lord of the Meeting Rivers—my refuge!”

How can I feel right
about gods who eat up lacquer and melt,
who shrivel when they see fire?

How can I feel right
about gods who are sold out of need?

How can I feel right
about gods who are buried out of fear?

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
self-born, one with himself,

he alone is the true god.

The pot is a god. The winnowing fan is a god.
The stone in the street is a god.
The comb is a god. The bowstring is a god, see!
The jar is a god. The water-vessel is a god, see!

Gods, gods, there are so many
there's no place left
to put a foot.

There's only one god.
The Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

What is the reward in a faithless wife,
a kinsman without friendship, a body without life?
What is the price of an unwanted servant,
a king deserted by fortune, a god who withdraws
boons?

Fools who seek

fragrance in a faded flower,
charm in a wizened whore,
depth in a stagnant pool.

Our Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
the Beloved of Her the mountain-born,
is the Prime Mover and Cause,
the Highest Guru of the world.

I have seen
 shoulders burnt after Viṣṇu worship.
I have seen
 nakedness after Jina worship.
I have seen
 men barking like dogs after Mailāra worship.
I have seen them
 called devotees of god
 after they worshipped the men
 of our Lord of Confluence.

As soon as they see water
they dip in it.

They circumambulate
every tree they see.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
how can they know you,
they who seek waters that run dry
and trees that wither?

In a priest's house,
where they feed the fire with *ghi*
as a god

when the fire gets wild
and burns, they splash on it

sink water and street dust

and yell and call the crowd
to their aid.

They forget the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
and scold their sacrificial fire!

What of it that you have read so much?
 What of it that you have heard so much?
 What of it that you know by heart
 all the four Vedas inside out?

Unless you perform the worship of the Linga,
 great god, should I call you a Brahmin?

Never!

It is said:

A man is born a Śūdra;
 he becomes a twice-born by his deeds;
 he becomes a scholar by his lore;
 he becomes a Brahmin who walks the Brahmin way.

It is said:

The man in whom there is no Brahman is low born.
 Therefore, O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,

I say:

The Brahmin is the ass who carries the Veda as
 load.

Don't leap on many boughs.
Don't feed the bodywork alone.

Don't go astray and act a fool
in the ways of the world.

What you call discipline
is but a mossy, slippy stone.

Without affection and devoid of feeling
all what you do is but a waste.

Don't be afraid, don't be distressed,
bow not to other gods.

It is for me to see that you receive
a reward from the hands

of our Lord of Confluence.

Our Lord's man must have the strength to say,
 "I will not have another's wealth".

Our Lord's man must have the strength to say,
 "I will not have another's wife".

Our Lord's man must have the strength to say,
 "I will not have another god".

Our Lord's man must have the strength to say,
 "Linga and Jangama are One".

Our Lord's man must have the strength to say,
 "Prasāda is the Truth".

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers scorns
 those that have no strength.

He'll grind you into tiny shape.

He'll rub you till your colour shows.

If, on grinding, you become small,

if, on rubbing, you become gold,

the Lord of the Meeting Rivers

will love you

and treasure you in his heart.

What is to come tomorrow to me,
let it come today;
what is to come today to me,
let it come at once:

for here is no coward heart,

here is no coward heart.

Whatever is born, they say, must die.

It is not in the power of Hari or Brahmā or the other
gods

to wipe out what our Lord of the Meeting Rivers
has written down
as his writ.

Listen, my dear fellow:

For you alone

I wear these men's clothes.

Sometimes I am a man,

sometimes I am a woman.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,

for you I'll be a warrior,

for you I'll be your devotees' bride.

After the King has made me come
into his bed and lain with me
should I still fear?

I am a lucky one!

After I had been tapped against his touchstone
should there still be iron?

But if the Lord of Confluence
should spurn me
could I live on?

Your wideness is the wideness of the world,
the wideness of the firmament,
and wider still;

your feet go deeper than the underworld,
your crown is higher than the universe,
you, Linga, who are imperceptible,
past understanding, unlimited,
incomparable.

But coming to the hollow of my hand
you shrink to almost nothing,
light and minikin,

Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

The Veda quaked and shivered,
the Śāstra turned and stepped aside,

Logic, unable to dispute, fell mute,
the Āgamas, swerving and shaking, stood apart—

because our Lord of the Meeting Rivers
ate at Cannayya's house.

Prasādi
(*Receiving*)

771

The fearful will die
 even though only touching a rope upon an anthill.
The fearless won't die
 even though bitten by the tooth of a snake.
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
the receiving of grace
is indeed a deadly black poison to the fearful!

Prāṇalingi
(*Experience*)

802

If you should speak, your words should be
like pearls strung upon a thread.

If you should speak, your words should be
like the light of a ruby red.

If you should speak, your words should be
like a straight crystal spear.

If you should speak, the Linga should approve
and say, "Yes, yes, my dear."

But if your actions should betray your words
could the Lord of the Meeting Rivers care?

Each one to himself, they are all
men with the forehead-eye.
Each one to himself, they are all
riders upon the bull.
Each one to himself, they are all
holders of trident, sword and bowl.

Who are the gods?
Who are the devotees?
Listen, Lord!
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers!
Your men are free men.
Make them say of me:
He's Basava, useless and bare!

The rich
will make temples for Śiva.
What shall I, O Lord,
a poor man, do?

My legs are pillars,
the body the shrine,
the head the cupola of gold.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
listen, O Lord:
Standing things shall fall,
that which moves shall stay.

Truly, you are
the pusher of my heart
within its eight-petalled lotus-core.
Therefore I believed.
I don't know anything else.

You are the ultimate freedom.
I live in the belief
that Linga and Jangama are one.

O Supreme Lord,
God of the Meeting Rivers.

I shed hunger, thirst, sleep—
you are the cause!

I shed lust, anger, greed, infatuation, envy, pride—
you are the cause!

I shed the five senses, the seven elements, the eight-
fold arrogance—
you are the cause!

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
that which pleases your men
satisfies me, too.

When once the body is your own,
I have no other body.

When once the heart is your own,
I have no other heart.

When once the wealth is your own,
I have no other wealth.

When once I know that these three
are yours,
is there for me another thought,
O Lord of Confluence?

I am no worshipper
I am no servant
I am not even a beggar
O Lord
Without your grace

O God
Whenever the maid feels worn out and tired
the mistress of the house does the work

Do it all yourself
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers

The snare coils round the mount:
You hurled, Lord, the net of sin
in front of the beast.
Although the huntsman beat the game,
the quarry is not trapped.
The beast that had been caught
within the net spread by Hara
has become a meal
for the Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Love me if you would love; if not
do understand me, Lord, aright.

When I imbibe the blazing light of the Linga, Lord,
do understand me right.

In the Lord of the Meeting Rivers

I have lost myself, O Lord.

What shall I say of the bliss
when body melts and merges like
a hailstone or a waxen doll?

Lord, tears of bliss brim over
and overflow my eyes!

What shall I say of the bliss
of our union—for I have joined
our Lord of the Meeting Rivers!

There's no one to serve.

Unless you serve, I cannot stand.

There's no one to beg.

Unless you beg, I cannot stand.

There's no one to join.

Unless you join, I cannot stand.

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,

look at me,

for I cannot stand all alone.

Fragrance of Knowledge rises of its own accord
and I know not of what is what

The Light of Linga is absorbed in me
and I know not of what is what

In meditation on the Lord of Confluence
I know not what is what

Put intelligence in the body's pot
as offerings. Pour in the water
of equipoise. As pincers
use the senses. And feed
the fire of knowledge.

When the broth thickens with your reason's spoon,
the cooking done—
make him sit down within your heart
and serve him the food of joy.
That is the meal for
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Eyes full—there's nothing to see
Ears full—there's nothing to hear
Hands full—there's nothing to worship
Heart full—there's nothing to think
Of the great Lord of the Meeting Rivers

Śaraṇa
(*Bliss*)

860

The eating bowl is not one bronze
and the mirror to look in another.
Same metal, same shape:
a mirror, reflecting light.

Aware, one is the Lord's man;
unaware, a mere human.

Worship the Lord and don't forget,
our Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

To know the way is rare.

To know and then forget is strange.

To be united and then to bow in worship is extraordinary.

Your devotion to the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
is like the youth of the proud.

An earthen pot cannot be earth again
by cancelling its form.

Once butter melts and turns to *ghī*
it cannot be butter again
by cancelling its form.

Gold will not turn to iron
by cancelling its form.

The pearl, born in water, will not become water
by cancelling its form.

Once you have been the devotee
of the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
you cannot become again
an ordinary man
by cancelling your form.

Shall I say: The sea is great?

The earth holds it.

Shall I say: The earth is great?

The jewel in the snake-king's hood holds it.

Shall I say: The snake-king is great?

He is contained within the signet-ring
on the small finger of Pārvatī.

Shall I say then: Pārvatī is great?

She's only a half of Paramēśvara.

Shall I say then: Paramēśvara is great?

He's held in the point of points
of the mind of our Lord of Meeting Rivers'
men.

There is one earth
for Śiva's temple—and the village of the pariahs.
There is one water
for the clean bath—and for the latrine.
There is one clan of those who know themselves.
There's one reward for those who are released
by means of sixfold philosophy.
There is one high abode
for those who know you,
Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Milk is what the calf left over,
water what the fish.
Flowers are left over from the bees.

How can I worship you,
O Śiva, how can I worship you?

But it's not for me to despise these left-overs.
So take what comes,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

Mother,
what news shall I tell
of the lord of my household?
The body-language he dislikes.
Unless I wipe off the dirt in my eyes
he won't let me see him.
Unless I wash my hands
he won't let me touch him.
Unless I wash my feet
he won't sleep with me.

Because I washed my body from head to feet
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
has made love to me!

Daughter,

I say you ought to blush
whenever you see my son-in-law.

Daughter,

I say you should step aside
whenever you see my son-in-law.
There is no screen to blush behind,
there is no place to step aside.

When both of us have but one lord,
where then, my daughter, is the screen?

When you have taken for your man
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
where then, my daughter, is the screen?

When a barren woman and a eunuch
begot a son,

he became the master of my debt,

he became the master of my wealth.

He fell inseparably in love

with that one mind which I acquired.

When a son like the Lord of Confluence is born

he lives with his body as mother,

his soul as father

as I made him.

Aikya
(*Union*)

935

To become a devotee
 is to surrender one's devotion.
To become a fit man
 is to surrender one's fitness.
To enter Union
 is to surrender one's ego.

Self-surrender must be
in everything.

The worth of this surrender
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
alone knows.

If you say, He is Linga,
there is no outer form, no form.
If you say Jangama,
there is no empty space, no space.
This, indeed, is Śaivahood,
this, indeed, is Śiva's mystery
 'He is the cause and essence of all souls'.
So it is said.
In an inaccessible place
hides he,
the Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
my maker.

Earth, water, fire, air, ether—
all are within Paramātmā Linga
who is the origin and the ground.

Incomprehensible,
without beginning, middle or end,
neither the Vedas nor all the Śāstras
can tell about him
this, or that—
the great, the glorious

Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

What of it how many holes has the anthill?
It is the only place where the snake lives!
Think of it—
and stop thinking in terms of thought.
When you think of that thought
it is beyond all thought,

O Lord of the Meeting Rivers.

He is the conqueror of all, the breaker of the bow,
the subduer of paradise.

He is the conqueror of Indra, the conqueror of men,
the conqueror of hell, the conqueror of skies.

He tames the horse, he tames the cow, he tames
the self.

He is the one who knows. He's beyond knowledge,
beyond sound.

He is the Supreme Bliss of Ecstasy.

He's without parts.

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers

is the Light glowing from the peak mass of light,
thousand-rayed, splendourous,
irradiated by billion suns.

O Lord

I was greater than the greatest
inside the Grand Absolute, haughty and deep.

How can I tell

the way the word that *I am* within the lofty light
which is the Lord of the Meeting Rivers
has been turned to Silence?

Look at the Being
that persists when all the murky darkness is dis-
pelled!

When light has been enthroned on light,
the Lord of Meeting Rivers alone knows
the Union of light
when wedded unto light.

O Lord

the inner and the outer are now one
soul married unto soul

You are beyond the Primal Sound
beyond the subtle matter
beyond change

You the ground and origin O Lord

The Lord of the Meeting Rivers alone
the joy and bliss of Union on high

Notes on the Poems

(Number refers to poem)

To demonstrate the structural properties and to illustrate the phonic nature of the original, I give here one of Basava's *vacanas* in the Kannaḍa text.

vacanadalli nimma nāmāmṛta tumbi
 nayanadalli nimma mūruti tumbi
 kiviyaḷli nimma kīruti tumbi
 manadalli nimma nenahu tumbi

kūḍalasaṅgamadēvā

nima caraṇakamaladoḷagānu tumbi

(491)

Lit. transl.

In the speech—your—name-nectar—filling

In the eyes—your—image—filling

In the ears—your—fame—filling

In the mind—your—thought—filling

O god of confluence

Your feet-lotus-within I am a bee

Observe the parallelisms in the structure; there is a horizontal structure in the first four lines, the sequence of Locative-Possessive-Subject-Verb. This structure is repeated in the vertical arrangement, so that we get a definite pattern of syntagmatic-paradigmatic nature with parallel fillers in the slots: speech-name; sight-image; hearing-fame; mind-thought. Then the structure is broken

with the invocation, and the pointe closes the *vacana*. This pointe is based on the double meaning of the word *tumbi*: (1) as verb 'be full, complete, abound, brim', (2) as noun 'a large black bee'.

491

My speech is brimming with the nectar of Thy name
 My eyes are brimming with Thy image
 My ears are brimming with Thy fame
 My mind is brimming with the thoughts of Thee
 O Lord of Confluence
 I am a bee
 hid in the lotus of Thy feet

- 15 Māyā: Illusion, delusion; worldly allurements. In Vīraśaivism, the Lord's creative power. Māyā or Śakti creates desire and engagement (*pravṛtti*) for creation in general, and for each individual in particular. Bhakti is the 'counter-move'.
- 35 *ghī*: clarified butter; a prestigious ingredient of Indian cuisine; symbol of well-being.
- 79 Om nama Śivāya: the Pañcākṣaramahāmantra, 'the Great Sacred Formula of Five Syllables', the only prayer-formula a devout Vīraśaiva uses.
 Hara, lit. 'Remover, Seizer, Destroyer', epithet of Śiva.
 Śaṅkara, lit. 'Giver of Joy', epithet of Śiva.
- 98 Indra: the king of the *devas* (the gods of the Paradise).
- 117 anthill: Snakes, particularly cobras, live very often in the large deserted anthills built by white ant.
- 125 Bodiless God: Kāma, the god of Lust. For having disturbed Śiva's life of austerity he was made bodiless by a flash from the Third Eye of Śiva.
 our Lord's Men: the *śaraṇas* (lit. 'the surrendered'), Śiva's faithful devotees, militant Vīraśaivas.
- 139 Benares (Banāras, Varāṇasī): the most sacred city of the Hindus.
 Kailāsa: a mythical mountain, Śiva's abode, supposed to be located in the Himālayas.
- 168 Illusion: see Māyā (15).

- 187 Jangama: an itinerant religious teacher who is supposed to be considerably advanced in his progress towards union with Śiva.
- the Immovable and the Movable are one: one of the key-pronouncements of Viraśaiva doctrine (see Postscript).
- 189 the Moving one: i.e. Jangama (187).
- 194 Jangama: see 187.
- by 'our men' are meant the *śaraṇas* of Lord Kūḍala Saṅgama, i.e. those who have surrendered to Śiva, see 125.
- 206 the basic triad of Viraśaivism: Guru, Linga and Jangama (see Postscript).
- 207 triple dedication: to Guru, Linga and Jangama.
- 212 *bhakti*: in Viraśaivism, not only fervent and unconditional devotion to Śiva, but also love for the Linga as a strategy to achieve liberation through disengagement; philosophically, *bhakti* is one of the two 'powers' of the Lord, the other being *Māyā* or *śakti*. These two are ultimately one, not different from each other except by direction: one evolves, another devolves.
- 227 Rudra of the Doomsday Fire (Kālāgni Rudra): the fire at the time of the destruction of the world; Rudra is the red-coloured destructive manifestation of Śiva.
- 235 This *vacana* which, in Kannaḍa, begins with the words *kalabēḍa kolabēḍa* is very popular and authoritative since it contains in five lines the basic moral code of Viraśaivism. It is often quoted as opening verse in books, recited and sung in functions and ceremonies, etc.
- 252 Śaṅkari: consort of Śaṅkara (Śiva in benign form).
- Vedas: the earliest religious scriptures of Aryan Indians. They are four in number (Ṛg, Yajur, Sāma and Atharva) and are regarded as *śruti*, revealed, eternal tradition. The Viraśaivas accept their authority.
- Iṣṭalinga: the personal Linga which is given by the Guru at the time of initiation of the aspirant. This *vacana* clearly equates the authority of the mantra uttered by the Guru with the authority of the Vedas, and the identity of Iṣṭalinga as the manifestation of the Supreme with the 'highest substance' revealed by the Vedas.

- 268 The lines in the inverted commas are, in the original text, in Sanskrit.
- 316 Siriyāḷa, Siriyāḷadēva: One of the Śaiva saints of Tamilnadu. His Tamil name was Siruṭṭonḍar. Śiva came to him in the disguise of a religious mendicant and demanded that the flesh of his only son be cooked and served him. Siriyāḷa fulfilled his desire. Śiva, highly pleased with this supreme devotion, took Siriyāḷa, his wife and son to his paradise on Kailāsa (cf. the Tamil Cīṟuṭṭonṭanāyanārpuṛāṇam in Cēkkiḷār's *Periyapurāṇam*, c. A.D. 1135).
- 345 Cannayya, also Cennayya, Mādara Cennayya, an untouchable Śaiva saint. According to Viraśaiva legends, he was the contemporary of the great Tamil monarch Karikāla Cōḷa (second century A.D.?). His task was to supply fodder to royal stables. Śiva preferred the porridge offered in an earthen plate by this poor untouchable to the rich dishes offered on the golden plates by the king. Cannayya is mentioned twenty-eight times in Basava's *vacanas*.
- Kakkayya was a close associate of Basava, and an untouchable, too. In a few *vacanas*, Basava disowns his Brahmin birth and, in a kind of forceful hyperbole declares himself to be the illegitimate child of the servants of untouchable devotees.
- 346 see 345, and the biography of Basava.
- 351 Nimbavve: a woman saint of Karnāṭaka whose *kāyaka* 'job' was to supply water to the houses of Śaiva devotees. For Cannayya, cf. 345.
- Kānci : an ancient town in Tamilnadu. Siriyāḷa (cf. 316) lived in Kānci.
- 361 I spread my garment: Kannaḍa *seragoḍḍu*—to take the end of one's garment down under the shoulder, put both hands under it and stretch it forth as a sign of a very humble petition.
- Lines 7-9 are in Sanskrit.
- 364 A bird ('the Greek partridge') which is supposed to subsist on moon-beams.

- 418 The entire poem illustrates the basic contrast of 'sthāvara' static, immovable and 'jangama' moving, movable.
- 490 Take notice of the erotic imagery of this poem; *rati* in the original text means sexual passion; *nimir* to become erect, the stand up, out.
- 493 The basic contrast is illustrated here by the opposition of measure: spontaneity. In the Kannaḍa original, concrete metrical units are named (*amṛtagaṇa*, *dēvagaṇa*).
- 509 This poem is a close echo of the Tamil Śaiva poetry of the *nāyaṇmārs*, which frequently describes Śiva's appearance and alludes to mythical events. Śiva in one of his aspects is Ardhanārīśvara, half man half woman (probably embodying a syncretism of the Śiva- and the *śākta*-cults), symbolizing the ultimate unity of man-woman relationship.
- Bāṇa was a Śaiva poet said to have cut off both his hands and regained them by virtue of his devotional hymns to Śiva.
- Nambi Ārūrār alias Sundaramūrti is one of the four greatest Tamil Śaiva poet-saints. His devotion to Śiva was that of an intimate companion (*tampirāṇ tōlan*); hence Śiva was involved in his amorous adventures.
- 538 A description of Śiva Nāṭarāja, the Lord of Cosmic Dance. Lines 4-7 are quoted from a Sanskrit text, *Mahimna-stotra*, *padya* 16 (so says the commentary).
- 545 The Veda says: Obviously an allusion to an often quoted saying *Ekam sat viprā bahudhā vadanti* (Ṛg I.164.46), "That what is one is called different names by the seers."
- 550 Viṣṇu: The second great god of the Hindu 'trinity', whose 'function' is the preservation and protection of world and life. He is believed to appear as ten incarnations (e.g. Kṛṣṇa, Rāma) and Basava obviously alludes to some of the less attractive and less savoury ones.
- Brahmā: The first great god of the 'trinity', the Creator of the universe; his head was once chopped off by Śiva.
- Veda: see 252.
- Śāstras: technical and scientific treatises on various subjects (astronomy, linguistics, politics, ethics, sex, etc.).

- Purāṇas: collections of ancient myths, legends, tales and traditional history.
- Āgamas: handbooks of worship and ritual.
- 555 Banyan: a sacred tree.
- Mārāyya, etc.: names of petty gods and goddesses of the villages (*grāmadevatā*); they are often represented by mud-pots and vessels.
- 556 One of the earliest references to the 'lost wax' method of casting metal images.
- 562 The Beloved of Her the mountain-born: allusion to Śiva's consort Pārvatī, the daughter of the king of the Himālaya mountains.
- 568 Worshippers of Viṣṇu, particularly Viṣṇu's priests, and female dancers (*devadāsīs*) in Viṣṇu's temples, carried the mark of Viṣṇu, usually a wheel or discs with six spokes, burnt into their skin on the arm or shoulder. One sect of Jaina monks (Digambaras, i.e. 'air-clad') go about naked. Mailāra is a local god in the form of a man made of straw and jute; his devotees are said to bark like dogs to please him.
- 584 *ghī*: see 35.
- 586 Śūdra: the fourth and lowest of the four *varṇas* (social classes). The twice-born are the members of the three 'upper classes' (i.e. in ascending order, Vaiśyas, Kṣatriyas and Brahmins) since they undergo the initiation ceremony—a 'second birth'.
- Brahman: the Highest Absolute. The quotes (it is said) are in Sanskrit in the original, and express 'lofty' truths of normative Hinduism. As against this, Basava gives his own quote (I say:). We must, though, realize that the authority of the Veda as such is not questioned by the Vīraśaivas. Only its *literatim* interpretation and 'carrying it as load' is ridiculed by Basava.
- 676 Consecrated food: one of the *aṣṭāvaraṇas* 'eight coverings' (cf. Postscript).
- 696 Hari ('yellow, reddish brown?'), an epithet of Viṣṇu. For Brahmā, see 550.

- 743 Allusion to the Guru placing the tiny Iṣṭalinga into the palm of the hand of the devotee. See also Postscript.
- 749 For Veda, Śāstra and Āgama, cf. 252 and 550. Cannayya was an untouchable devotee of Śiva, cf. 345.
- 771 Cf. 117.
- 818 men with the forehead-eye: Śiva has a third eye (the eye of divine knowledge) on his forehead;
riders upon the bull: Śiva's riding animal (*vāhana*) is the white bull Nandi alias Basava; Śiva is also often represented as holding a trident and/or a sword and/or a begging bowl.
- 820 This *vacana* contains the famous line *sthāvarakkaḷivunṭu, jangamakkaḷivilla*, lit. 'standing things shall experience destruction, that which moves shall not be destroyed'.
- 821 In esoteric Yoga, the core of the heart is represented as an eight-petalled lotus. The Divine dwells in this heart which is not identical with the physical organ of the body.
- 831 This poem is composed in the *dasa-bhāva* or master-servant stance.
- 835 A *beḷagina vacana* or 'riddle' poem, 'fancy' poem; i.e. a poem with esoteric symbolism (such poems are very rare in Basava's work but frequent in the poetry of Allama Prabhu).
- Hara (lit. 'Remover, Destroyer'): epithet of Śiva.
- 850 The Light of Linga : Very frequently the term *beḷagu* 'light' occurs in the *vacanas* when the poets attempt to speak of the unspeakable—of godhead, of the Absolute. In this poem, we encounter *lingada beḷagu*, 'the light of the Linga'. In line five, 'meditation' translates the technical term *dhyāna*.
- 851 In this delightful stanza, the words and images of day-to-day use are employed: the earthen pot (*ghaṭa*) of the body, food-offerings for gods (*sayadāna*) laddle, spoon (*saṭṭuga*), meal, eating (*ārōgaṇe*).
- 869 *ghī*: see 35.
- 876 According to Indian folklore some snakes, particularly cobras, carry a yellowish-greenish precious stone in

their hoods or heads or bodies; they worship it, and hunt for prey in the light which it emits.

Pārvatī: the daughter of the king of the mountains, and consort of Śiva. In her signet-ring is contained the King of snakes. In the Ardhanārīśvara form, Pārvatī is half of Parameśvara, i.e. Śiva.

878 pariahs: the untouchables.

sixfold philosophy: the six orthodox systems of Hindu philosophy, so-called six 'visions' (*darśanas*): Nyāya, Vaiśeṣika, Sāṃkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, Vedānta.

914 Another *beḍagina vacana*, riddle poem.

935 Key-words of Viraśaiva mysticism: *sarvadalli dasohave bēku*, lit. it is necessary (to have) in everything the attitude of the devotee to god as slave to master.

949 Earth, water, etc.—the five elements according to Hindu philosophy.

Paramātmā ('The Supreme Soul') Linga is the Linga as the symbol of the Ultimate Absolute, incomprehensible and indescribable.

954 Indra: see 98.

He tames the horse..., etc.: allusions to Purāṇic myths of Śiva. In the final verses, Basava uses the image of light (*beḷagu*) which appears frequently in *vacana* poetry to describe the divine. Cf. also 956 and 957. These last poems are replete with the music of Sanskrit and Kannaḍa, and are virtually untranslatable. Cf. the beginning of 956: *ghana gambhira mahāghanadoḷage/ghanakke ghanavāgidden ayyā*)

Postscript

The Life of Basavēśvara

The biography of Basavaṇṇa has many sources: inscriptions, edicts, hagiographies, *purāṇas*, his own poems, folk-traditions, and a few attempts at critical biographies. And yet, there is a marked absence of sufficient truly reliable historical material. Since Basava was so many things—a saint, a poet, a political activist, a social reformer, a minister—it is not surprising that he should have been both praised as well as slandered and condemned. What follows is a reconstructed life-story of Basava, based on most of the available sources, and presented critically yet with sympathy and understanding.

Basava (other forms of the name in current use are Basavaṇṇa, lit. 'elder-brother B.' or Basavēśvara 'lord B.') was born in a village called Inguḷēśvara-Bāgēvāḍi, the headquarters of the taluk of the same name in the Bijāpur district of Karnāṭaka. During the 11th-12th Century A.D., it was an *agrahāra*—a Brahmin settlement—housing five hundred Brahmin families in addition to several families of different castes. Most of the Brahmins were Śaivites, well versed in Vedic lore and devotional songs. The centre of activities of the small town was the big Śiva temple there.

The headman of the town was Maṇḍageya Mādirāja. Mādāmbike was his wife. They were Śaiva Brahmins of the Kamme family belonging to Sāṅkhyāyana *gotra*. Mādirāja was a highly respected person of commanding personality. But the couple had no male issue for a long time. Mādāmbike observed therefore the vow of Nandikeśvara (so-called Vṛṣabhavrata), begging Śiva's sacred bull, god Nandi, for a son. And indeed, she was

blessed with a child whom she named Basava (the Kannaḍa form of the Sanskrit Vṛṣabha, 'the Bull of Śiva').

The child grew up into a young boy in an orthodox Brahmin family of Sanskrit scholars. His father wanted him to become a scholar and a leader of the Brahmin community. And indeed, the boy was extraordinarily intelligent and had an amazing intuition. In no time he learnt reading, writing, arithmetic, poetry, grammar, Vedas, Āgamas and Purāṇas. His parents were rich and affectionate; being the son of a privileged family, Basava obviously enjoyed a special position among the children. But, judging from several allusions in his poetry, he must have had some shattering experiences. His sensitivity and intelligence brought him to the realization of the social abyss between himself, a sheltered, privileged, rich Brahmin boy, and the naked, ill-fed and despised children of the low castes. The double life of the Brahmins became revolting to him: selfish and self-centered, cunning and deceitful, they performed their religious duties to achieve their worldly ends. Basava found the caste system and the ritualism of his home senseless and oppressive. At the same time, he loved to listen to the stories of men of God, in particular the legends about the sixty-three Śaiva saints of the Tamil country. Some of these stories—of Kaṇṇappa who has given his eyes to Śiva, of Siriyāla who was prepared to sacrifice his own son to please God—must obviously have made a deep impression on him since we find allusions to them again and again in his poems.

Every Brahmin should undergo an initiation ceremony called *upanayana*. The rite means that the boy is taken to a teacher and given to him for proper instruction and education. This formal education began usually at the age of eight, and its outer symbol was the investiture with the sacred thread.

Basava reached now his eighth year and Mādirāja, like any orthodox Brahmin father, made all arrangements for the initiation ceremony. However, the boy revolted. He declared that he was not interested in such rites and that he would not wear the sacred thread. He even threatened to run away from home. But finally he apparently agreed, with great reluctance, to undergo the ceremony, for there are records of an *upanayana* for Basava dated in A.D. 1113-14.

Before a final confrontation between Basava and his parents could take place, his parents died (A.D. 1114). Basava went to live for some time with his grandmother. However, he found it impossible to observe all Brahminic rites and began to protest against caste injustices. After a few years, he took a final decision to leave the society in which he was born. He tore off his sacred thread and threw it away. When the situation at home became intolerable, he left his home and the town of Bāgēvāḍi, accompanied by his elder sister Nāgāmbike (Akkanāgamma), and went eastwards, until he reached Kappaḍisangama, where 'two rivers meet'.

Kappaḍisangama (also called Kūḍala Sangama or simply Sangama) is now a village in Hungund taluk of Bijāpur district. *Kūḍalu* and *Saigama* both mean 'confluence (of rivers)': indeed, it is a lovely place where the river Mālāprabhā joins the Kṛṣṇā, and on the brow of the confluence is erected the temple of Śīva-Sangamēśvara. It is a holy place and it was a famous centre of pilgrimage visited by tens of thousands all round the year. Also, in the age of Basava it was renowned for its scholarship. Basava decided to settle down in Kūḍala Sangama. There, he found his chosen God, the Lord of the Meeting Rivers, Śīva-Sangamēśvara or, as he was also called, Kūḍala-Sangamadēva.

The temple was presided by a chief priest whose name was Īśānya Guru. Very probably, he belonged to an order of monks of the Lakuliśa-Pāśupata Śaiva sect. He noticed Basava's deep attachment to God. He consoled and comforted him, and assigned to him the duty of bringing fresh water and flowers for worship.

The temple of the Lord of Confluence became everything to the young man. He would dance and sing for his God, and he would start teaching people devotional songs. The fame of this god-intoxicated youth began to spread. Basava began to attract people's attention, and thus Kūḍala Sangama became not only the seat of his personal *sāadhanā* or spiritual experience but also the foundation was laid there for his life of a religious and social leader.

An inner voice probably urged Basava to leave his sheltered life, go out into the world and work for mankind. On the other hand, it was difficult for him to leave Kūḍala Sangama and his

Lord. Legend tells us that Lord Sangamēśvara himself appeared in his dreams, assuring Basava repeatedly that he would always be with him. Then only he made up his mind and went to Maṅgaḷavēḍa where Bijjaḷa was a feudatory ruler under the royal dynasty of the Chalukyas of Kalyāṇa.

The lives of Basava and Bijjaḷa are so intimately connected that it is necessary to say a few words about this fascinating and tragical personality in the history of Karnāṭaka. Bijjaḷa belonged to the family of the Kalachuris who originated from Bandelkhand in Madhyapradeś. One branch of that dynasty came to South India and settled in Maṅgaḷavēḍa (Sholāpur district) as liegemen of the Chalukyas. Bijjaḷa was the son of Permadi who was closely related to the ruling imperial house of the Chalukyas. When the emperor died and his younger brother Taila III came to the throne, the ambitious, brave, cunning and able Bijjaḷa exploited the great inability and weakness of the young ruler, and ran the kingdom in his stead. In about A.D. 1162 he dethroned Taila, declared himself emperor, and very probably put Taila to death.

When Basava first came to Maṅgaḷavēḍa, though, Bijjaḷa was still a feudal lord ruling in the name of the Chalukya emperor.

The *purāṇic* biographies of Basava tell us that his maternal uncle Baladēva (alias Siddhadānandanātha) was treasurer and minister of Bijjaḷa, and that it was on his advice that Bijjaḷa appointed Basava as *gaṇaka* or accountant.

A *gaṇaka* was an important official in the state administrative apparatus. He had to be honest and intelligent. Basava seems to have had all the qualities of an ideal accountant. Both his uncle and the ruler were pleased with his work. When soon after his arrival in Maṅgaḷavēḍa the treasurer died, Bijjaḷa appointed Basava Chief Treasury Officer (*bhaṇḍāri* with the title of *daṇḍanāyaka*).

Basava has now acquired position, power and fame. Shortly after the death of his uncle, he married his two daughters, Gangambike and Nīlālōcane. A very rare case: Basava knew how to combine in his own person a fully active and fully contemplative life. Simultaneously with his rise to power, Basava's devotion to Śiva matured, and, as the hagiographer says, 'not only was he the ruler's treasurer, but he also became the treasurer of the

Lord's love (*bhakti-bhaṇḍāri*). His fame as a man of honesty, purity, modesty and devotion spread far and wide. Śiva's wandering devotees (Jangamas) thronged his house. His home was described as *mahāmane* 'the great house'. Basava began composing and singing his *vacanas*, taking his inspiration from various sources: the lives of Tamil Śaiva saints, from Dēvara Dāsimayya of the 11th Century, from his own religious and social experience. He formulated his passionate monotheism:

dēvan obba, nāma halavu:
parama pativratege gaṇḍanobba
 "God is but one, many his names:
 the faithful wife knows but one lord."

He began to preach his social reform. A new community of 'heroic Śaivas' grew in Maṅgaḷavēḍa: it rejected social inequality, it disregarded caste, class and sex, it mocked religious ritualism and ignored social conventions, it challenged orthodoxy. A social and political crisis was at hand when thousands of people came, mostly recruited from the poor and down-trodden masses, and embraced Basava's teachings. Among them were farmers, weavers, hunters, fishermen, shoemakers, barbers, merchants, and even Brahmins.

The seeds of Basava's revolution—for, indeed, it was no more a reform but a revolution—were sown at Maṅgaḷavēḍa and they grew and bore fruit in Kalyāṇa.

In the meantime, many drastic political changes took place in the state. Bijjaḷa usurped the Chalukya throne in A.D. 1162 and moved his capital from Maṅgaḷavēḍa to Kalyāṇa. As a result, Basava also moved into Kalyāṇa at that time, and became the Chief Treasurer of the emperor.

We do not know what his reaction to Bijjaḷa's usurpation of the throne was. He was a loyal servant of his master, and apparently went about his own work in the new milieu of the imperial court of Kalyāṇa without much concern about Bijjaḷa's legitimacy. But the shifting of the capital had an important impact on his other activities.

Kalyāṇa was a big city bustling with life. Basava continued

to look after the state income and expenditure, and to keep records. For some time he was able—as stressed above—to achieve the rare, the almost impossible: to combine active, public, political life and loyalty to an unscrupulous though brave and able ruler with private, contemplative, non-attached existence of a religious thinker, poet, philosopher. However, after a time he was caught up in the conflict, as we see from several of his compositions. He calls himself Basava, useless and bare (818) who serves a wordling (*bhavi*, i.e. a non-Viraśaiva, a ‘non-believer’), sitting below his throne. The conflict did not remain a personal matter of Basava. Soon the emperor’s treasurer found himself in the midst of a public, social conflict.

First, there were isolated cases of unrest. We read, for example, of a washerman named Machayya and an untouchable called Śivanāgimayya roaming about the city without showing the expected deference to high-caste people. Machayya refused to wash the clothes of the upper classes. Śivanāgimayya stopped his customary warning shouting. The conservative elements in the society of Kalyāṇa accused Basava of instigating social unrest. Unavoidably, Basava earned some enemies while acquiring a large number of followers. Among the enemies were a few influential orthodox Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite Brahmins and even Jains, and some important officials. Since Basava fulfilled usually the needs and desires of the devotees who approached him and freely gave whatever they asked for, unmindful of the cost or consequences, allegations were made that he had squandered Bijjaḷa’s treasury to pamper his own people. We cannot say whether such charges were pure fictions or whether indeed Basava did spend money drawn from the state treasury to foster his own movement. Bijjaḷa wanted to verify whether there was any misappropriation and ordered an inquiry. The accounts were found to be correct to the last *hon* (‘gold coin’). In Basava’s poems there are a few references to this event, and these confirm that indeed charges were made against him.

The rift between Basava and the ruler was widening. There was growing opposition to the rising utopian group of his followers with its egalitarian ideals. Bijjaḷa, after all, was a follower of traditional Śaivism, fully aware of the fact that he had usurp-

ed the throne; he sensed danger in any attempt at social change. Basava's enemies gathered around the king and tried hard to poison his ears with gossip and accusation. As days went by, conflicts between Bijjala and Basava multiplied. If we are to believe the legends, Basava was even dismissed once and assumed his duties only after the ruler's apology. But Bijjala waited for a suitable opportunity to curb once and for all the rise of the Virāśaiva community in his country.

One of the communities whose anger and hatred Basava earned was his own Brahmin community. The temple was a well-established religious and social institution; but to Basava, it represented the establishment of the privileged, the rich and the bigots. He introduced into Virāśaivism the fundamental contrast between 'standing' and 'moving', *sthāvara* and *jangama*: the temple, being *sthāvara*, immovable, suggests stagnation and death; the body, being *jangama*, the 'going', moving temple, suggests life and growth. Make your body the temple of god; wear your own god on your body, take him along; a devotee's real love of Śiva is not tested in public but in privacy.

Such a move, though provocative and possibly not quite practicable, was logical and necessary for Basava. The orthodox were not prepared to admit the untouchables into temples; but Basava had neither means nor desire to build temples, and most of his followers were poor and low-caste people. Hence, there was no other way for Basava than to boycott temples.

He also dismissed pilgrimages (since a Virāśaiva is himself the abode of god) as waste of time, money and energy. He despised superstition. He attacked astrologers. He ridiculed the entire idea of pollution, absolutely crucial to established, normative Hinduism. For him, all men were basically equal. 'No man ever came out of his mother's ears', says Basava, implying that we were all born out of the same womb. He loved the untouchables and attacked the very roots of the caste system.

Probably the most revolutionary among his ideas was the concept of physical work as divine service—the doctrine of *kāyaka*. The word literary means anything connected with the body. It is physical exertion or activity which every individual should take up and perform with all sincerity, since no one should be a burden

to society. Exploitation of any kind was wholly unacceptable to Basava's god. Hence *kāyaka* came to imply hard work—physical or mental. 'We should realize him through the work we do', says Allama Prabhu. *Kāyaka Kailāsa*, 'Work is heaven', wrote Basava. This doctrine also implied that no occupation was inferior or superior to another—all jobs were of equal status and equally respectful if performed well.

Another evil which Basava attacked was wealth. He was convinced—probably correctly—that most rich people amassed their wealth through unfair means. Money was the root of all evil. Basava compared the rich orthodox people to a devotee who left his shoes outside and entered the temple: he stood before god, but worried only about the safety of his shoes outside.

Finally, for Basava, man and woman were like two eyes: one could not claim superiority over the other; they were like two sticks one placed over the other—both necessary to make fire. Vīraśaivism did not glorify celibacy; it did not condemn sex and marriage. Women enjoyed equal status with men; they were encouraged to express themselves through song and poetry. As a result, we find at least thirty-two women-poets who composed *vacanas* in the great century of Lingayata revival: Nīlālōcane and Gangāmbike, Basava's wives, composed poems, as did Basava's sister Akkanāgama; Pittavve the seller of pancakes, Ammave who spun yarn, but above all Akkamādēvi, were also among the female poets. As M. Chidananda Murthy writes: 'It is doubtful whether there were, at any time, in any other Indian language, so many women writers'.

It was only natural that finally Basava was accused of instigating the masses and upsetting established social order. Each of his concepts was new, far ahead of his times, a blow to orthodoxy and conservatism. His activities evoked in Bijjala feelings of anger, envy and fear.

The first crisis came when Jagadēva, a dignitary who, fascinated by Basava's teaching, had adopted the new ideas, and one day invited Basava to dine in his house at a religious function. When the preparations were ready, instead of waiting for Basava, Jagadēva invited a few Brahmins and fed them. Basava reproached Jagadēva for his incivility and tactlessness, refused to come

to his house, and Jagadēva repented his action and took a somewhat ferocious oath that he would atone for his action by killing an enemy of Vīraśaivism.

Two Vīraśaiva devotees lived in Kalyāṇa. Haraḷayya was an untouchable by birth, Madhuvayya a Brahmin. They were friends. Madhuvayya wanted to give his daughter in marriage to Haraḷayya's son. Basava had given his consent to the marriage and the entire Vīraśaiva community was jubilant over it. Such a marriage was, naturally, forbidden by law-givers. The traditionalists saw in it a terrible blow against the very pillars of their society. Bijjaḷa asked Haraḷayya and Madhuvayya to stop the marriage. They refused. The king lost his head: he summoned the two men and had their eyes plucked out; after having them blinded, they were dragged to death in the dust of the city streets (A.D. 1167).

This atrocity stunned the followers of Basava, caused wide commotion in the capital, and raised a storm of protest. Vīraśaivas were convinced that this act of the king was most likely to be followed by similar or even more cruel acts. So long as Bijjaḷa was alive, neither they nor their religion would be safe. The extremists among them, headed by Jagadēva and his friends, pleaded for revenge, whereas the milder elements counselled peace and forbearance. Basava, it is reported, was committed to non-violence, and did not favour the move to punish Bijjaḷa with death. However, he lost control over the movement; the extremist section had won.

According to other version, Basava himself reminded Jagadēva of his oath and Jagadēva gladly agreed to put an end to the king's life. Having entrusted this mission to him, Basava and his followers left Kalyāṇa.

One group headed by Basava left for Kūḍala Sangama and another, headed by Chennabasava (Basava's nephew), proceeded to Uḷavi.

Jagadēva came home; but his mother refused to serve him food. She said that as long as the oath he had taken remained unfulfilled she would treat him like a dog. Molle and Bomma, two friends of Jagadēva, joined him. It was evening and Bijjaḷa was sitting in his brightly lit hall of audience when Jagadēva and his aides rushed into the court-hall, pounced upon Bijjaḷa and mur-

dered him (A.D. 1167). Immediately after that, Jagadēva severed his own head and died, while the other two were probably caught and later put to death.

In the wake of this catastrophe, violence and chaos overtook the city. Bijjaḷa's kinsmen and troops chased Basava's followers, and the Viraśaivas, unable to withstand the onslaught, left Kalyāṇa and scattered in different directions.

In the meanwhile, Basava with his group reached Kūḍala Sangama. His mind was perturbed and he wanted peace. He survived Bijjaḷa only for a very short period of time, breathing his last in December A.D. 1167 or early next year. As Machayya put it, he 'was covered with the Light (*beḷagu*) and became Void (*bayalu*)'.

The short-lived Kalachurya empire came to an end soon, too. Bijjaḷa's son Murāri succeeded his father, but he had to face opposition from the followers of Basava whom he prosecuted, and from those who were adherents of the deposed Chalukya kings. He did not rule long; his four brothers came to the throne in quick succession. Taila III whom Bijjaḷa had ousted had a son who built an army and in A.D. 1184 was able to get back his father's kingdom.

Basava had left behind him a band of dedicated followers, and great new ideas. In addition to his unique achievement of creating a community based on the rejection of inequality of every kind, of ritualism and taboos, a society which exalted work in the world in the name of Lord Śiva, Basavaṇṇa has composed more than a thousand impassioned, striking, original poems in Kannaḍa free verse which are alive until this day, representing the wisdom and literature of the people of Karnāṭaka.

Chronology

A.D. 1105	Born at Bāgēvāḍi.
1113-14	<i>Upanayana</i> (Brahminic initiation).
1114	Death of parents.
1114-20	Living at Bāgēvāḍi with grandmother.
1121	Departure for Kūḍala Sangama.
1121-32	Stay at Kūḍala Sangama. Preparation for socio-religious reform.
1132	Departure from Kūḍala Sangama for Maṅgaḷavēḍa. Beginning of secular career: employment in the department of treasury.
1132-53	Office of Chief Treasury under Bijjaḷa.
1141	Inauguration of the movement of religious and social reform.
1141-53	The new movement gains popularity and mass support.
1153 or later	Departure from Maṅgaḷavēḍa for Kalyāṇa because of a conflict with Bijjaḷa. Arrival of Allama Prabhu in Kalyāṇa.
1153-67	Preaching the new faith; success of the movement. Widening rift between Basava and Bijjaḷa.
1167	Bijjaḷa's atrocity and death. Move to avenge Bijjaḷa. Confusion among Vira-śaivas.
December 1167- January 1168	Departure for Kūḍala Sangama. Final union with Lord Sangameśvara.

Vīraśaiva Philosophy and Doctrine

The Vīraśaiva (Lingāyata) philosophy and doctrine is seemingly very complex, particularly the highly evolved speculation about the various *līngas*, *aṅgas*, *śaktis* and *bhaktis*, and about the sub-stages of the main six phases (*ṣaṭsthala*). However, the essential teaching, and the basic philosophy, are rather coherent, systematic and simple. They may be summed up by the following (necessarily simplified) outline:

Individual goal: Unity with the Supreme Absolute (defined as both Śūnya alias Bayalu 'Void' and Pūrṇa 'Plenitude'), i.e. Śiva, through understanding and achievement, in this life itself.

Method: Liberation (*mukti*) of the creature (soul) through disengagement (*nivṛtti*) and selfless work (*kāyaka*) by the strategy of *bhakti* (devotion) for the Linga via spiritual progress through six phases (*ṣaṭsthala*).

Means: The eight coverings; the rites and the principles of conduct; the six-phase system.

I. *Aṣṭāvaraṇa* (The Eight Coverings or Emblems) are:

1. Guru—spiritual guide
2. Linga—the symbol of Śiva
3. Jangama—itinerant religious teacher
4. *pādōdaka*—holy water
5. *prasāda*—consecrated food
6. *vibhūti*—holy ash
7. *rudrākṣa*—rosary
8. *mantra*—sacred formula.

II. The *rites* correspond to the familiar 'rites-de-passage' with special stress on initiation-ceremony, marriage-ceremony and

death-ceremony. There are also the *pañcācāras* or the five principles of personal and social conduct to be followed.

III. Mystical process (the practice of the six-phase system) termed *ṣaṣṭhala siddhānta*:

1. *bhakti* : devotion—‘devotee’
2. *mahēśvara* : discipline—‘master’
3. *prasādi* : receiving—‘the Lord’s grace’
4. *prāṇalingi* : experience—‘the Linga in the life-breath’
5. *śaraṇa* : bliss—‘the surrendered’
6. *aikya* : oneness—‘union with the Lord’.

Lingāyatism is a religion the soul of which is to be sought neither in the *pañcācāra* (five rules of conduct) nor in the *aṣṭāvaraṇa* (eight emblems) but in the Lingānga samarasya—the integral association of god and soul the technique of which is the *ṣaṣṭhala* (six-phase path). *Pañcācāra* and *aṣṭāvaraṇa* are historical forms in which the innermost quality of religion expresses itself from time to time as creed or dogma or ritual worship.

It is the doctrine of the six stages or phases (*ṣaṣṭhala*) which is most directly reflected in the *vacanas*, particularly in their arrangement. That is why we shall deal with it in some detail. Among other aspects of Virāṣaiva faith encountered more frequently in the poems one must stress the eight *āvaraṇas*—in particular the worship of the Linga, the Guru and the Jangama; the doctrine of work as salvation; the militant monotheism of Basava, his attacks on the caste system, Brahminic ritualism and social evil.

Though there are available several—not very successful—modern expositions of Virāṣaivism (the best among them being the books by Sakhare and Nandimath), when explaining the essentials of the doctrine it is, I feel, much safer and much more legitimate to follow an original authoritative Lingāyata text. The best procedure is to adopt as guideline what is probably the earliest and the most prestigious text in Kannaḍa as far as the early formulation of the doctrine is concerned, namely the *Ṣaṣṭhala jñāna-sāmṃta* (The Essence of the Knowledge of the Six Phases) by Tōṇṭada Siddhalingēśvara (c. A.D. 1400-1470).

Śrī Tōṇṭada Siddhalingēśvara was born in about A.D. 1400

at Haradanahalli, and died c. 1470 at Yeḍeyūru where he is buried. It is recorded that one day, while performing his Linga worship at Kaggere (near Yeḍeyūru), the village was raided by bandits. The devotee who had invited him, ran for safety, but Siddhalinga remained seated lost in trance. A few years later, the devotee, Nambēṇṇa, returned to the village to find that an anthill had grown round the saint. A cow was seen pouring her milk upon the anthill. When the anthill was cleared, the saint was still lost in meditation, his gaze firmly set on his Linga.

The bulk of Siddhalingēśvara's *vacanas* are intellectual poems devoted to a systematic exposition of Vīraśaiva metaphysics and theology.

The Godhead, the Supreme Soul in the form of Śiva or Linga is the only eternal and real entity. It is first a self-subsistent Void (*bayalu*, *śūnya*) before time and creation. It is 'perfect and serene, beyond pairs of opposites, unstained, subsisting in itself, impersonal, beyond feeling and form, without attributes, absolute, immaculate, passionless, beyond illusion, inaccessible to knowledge.' This ineffable Supreme Thing, inconscient of Itself, exists 'when neither beginning, middle or end exists', when there is neither time nor timelessness, no name, form or function, nor notions such as part or whole, nor knowledge or ignorance.

In the evolution from impersonality to personality, the Absolute Void becomes the Śūnya Linga or Void-Linga, selfbegotten and impartite; it is Godhead pure and absolute, before there is body and mind or life and death, beyond categories, knowledge and thought, before existence, consciousness and bliss.

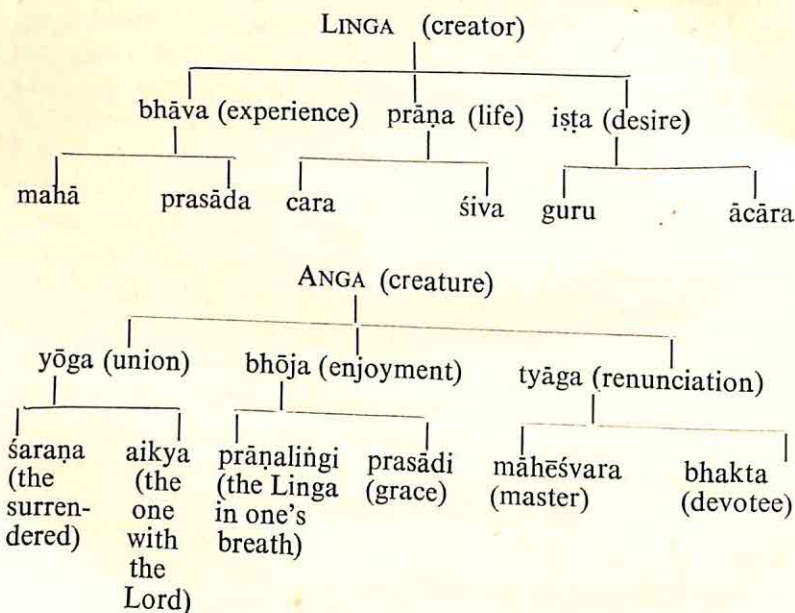
This Impartite Linga, by its own spontaneous act, through its own spontaneous 'sport', becomes Mahālinga, the Great Linga which is undivided, all-pervasive, circular-shaped mass of Light (*beḷagu*). This process of 'becoming' is compared to liquid ghee (clarified butter) congealing into solid ghee. The Mahālinga is identical with the mantra *Om*; it is filled with the light of 'infinite billions suns and moons'. And it is this 'incarnate light', this Supreme Effulgent Linga, which we encounter in the poems of the last phase of the *aikyasthala*; for it is this light (*beḷagu*) with which the individual soul strives to reach its final union.

In the course of untold time, Mahālinga, for His own sponta-

neous sport, divides, bifurcates, into Linga and Anga. The first dichotomy, the first binary opposition arises 'for their mutual delight'. 'At first, the formless Supreme Thing was by itself, alone', not conscious of Itself; this 'vast unconscious Thing', becoming conscious of Itself, became *the* Consciousness. And this Consciousness assumed the five attributes of 'existence, consciousness, bliss, perfection and eternity' and became formless Śiva-principle. By mere vibration of its energy, it divided into two, and hence it operates as Anga and Linga, 'worshipper' and 'worshipped', 'object' and 'subject', 'soul' and 'god'.

The Consciousness-Energy of this Paraśiva was, too, split into two modes: With reference to Linga, it is known as Śakti; with reference to Anga, it is known as Bhakti. Śakti represents evolution (*pravṛtti*), Bhakti represents involution (*nivṛtti*). With this development and at this moment, the 'chance' and 'necessity' combined, the evolution of the universe may begin.

Linga assumed six modes, and Anga assumed six modes; Śakti assumed six modes, and Bhakti assumed six modes.



The entire universe arose. Anga means *śaraṇa*, Linga means Śiva. The Linga is at all times the soul of the *śaraṇa*; the *śaraṇa*

is at all times the body of the Linga. Between these two—*śaraṇa* 'devotee' and Linga—there is no difference, 'no more than between seed and tree'.

In order to create the world, the Śiva principle, evolved into the Linga-Anga dichotomy, assumed the five-person form (*Pañca-mūrti*), and thus arose the five elements which constitute matter.

We shall only indicate the cosmological-metaphysical speculation, since it becomes too intricate and too heavy at this point, and we prefer to return to the place and the role of the individual Anga or human soul. It is best to let the poet (Siddhalingeśvara) speak for himself:

The formless Śiva-principle,
Existence-Consciousness-Bliss,
Eternal, perfect, of its own accord,
Became the Mahālinga, which is
The integral, perfect, circular-shaped,
Supernal light. . .
He shines as Sadāśiva himself,
As five-faced, ten-armed, fifteen-eyed,
Two-legged, one-bodied-one.
From the Īśānya face of that Sadāśiva
The sky was born;
From his Tatpuruṣa face, the air was born;
From his Aghōra face was born fire;
From his Vāmadēva face the earth was born;
From his mind, the Moon; Sun from his eyes;
From his hidden face,
The Soul was born which is
Of the nature of the Supreme Soul.

When the soul assumed a body, we have the beginnings of creation; and, later, consciousness, including the knowledge of the Divine.

The downward movement in the cosmos is accomplished, for, in man, evolution has reached its goal; the soul assumed a body, the dichotomy, the duality of Linga and Anga, creator and creature, is complete, the descent of man is finished.

However, once engagement has spent itself, disengagement may

begin; the downward movement of evolution provokes a counter-move—devolution. Once the knowledge of the Divine, the awareness of Śiva, emerges in an individual, the 'economy of salvation' may begin to function.

The inner knowledge that accrues to the *śaraṇa* ('the surrendered') manifests itself as the Guru. The *śaraṇa* sits at the Guru's feet and entreats his grace. The Guru first teaches the devotee the fundamental truth of the contrast and the unity of the *sthāvara* 'things standing, immovable' and the *jaṅgama* 'things moving': *sthāvarakkaḷivunṭu, jaṅgamakkaḷivilla* (Basava 820) 'standing things shall fall, that which moves shall stay'. However, the movable and the immovable—i.e. the living, moving representant of Śiva and its non-moving images in the temples, its icon—are one: *sthāvara jaṅgama onde* (Basava 381). Jangama is Linga (Basava 392: *jaṅgamave liṅga*), a moving, 'walking' Linga (*naḍaliṅga jaṅgama*, Basava 415). And Linga, Jangama and Guru are in fact one (Basava 424: *guruvinā guru jaṅgama*).

The Guru is part of a *tradition*, in which various masters are the embodiments of various qualities (Sangana Basavaṇṇa, our poet, is the embodiment of Existence; Prabhudēva, of Bliss; Cennabasava, of Consciousness; these three supreme masters also represent Guru, Jangama and Linga). Guru is the most important of the first triad:

The Guru, Linga, Jangama,
pādōdaka, prasāda, sacred ash,
rudrāksha beads, the five-syllable spell,
 these eight are Paraśiva Himself.

(Siddhalingēśvara 43)

Paraśiva himself acts as the Guru incarnate for the disciple's initiation's sake. To consolidate his grace, he invests his disciple with the Iṣṭalinga. The critical stage of *liṅgadhāraṇe* or 'Linga-wearing' begins.

The holy Guru, by drawing out
 the supreme spark that lay buried
 in my soul, made it
 into an image of Śivalinga

and set it
upon my palm.

The Linga is the symbol and real abode of the Parabrahman, the Supreme Ens, and of Paraśiva, the Supreme Lord. *Līyate yatra gamyate iti līṅgaḥ*—the Līṅga is the ultimate reality from which all beings are born, by which they move and live, and into which they enter after dissolution. It is the cosmic principle which is the source of the universe, manifested as a column of blazing fire or a mass of light, the visible symbol of the invisible Life and Consciousness existing eternally in all beings.

However, this amorphous representation of Śiva is worn on the body of the devotee as a gross, physical object called Iṣṭalinga, and worshipped daily in devotion, hanging round the neck of a Viraśaiva from the time of his birth to the time of his death. The person—man or woman—should never lose it, since to lose it is to lose life in the literal sense of the word.

It is made of light grey slate stone obtained from Parvatagiri, a place in North Arcot (Tamilnadu State in South India). It consists of two discs, each about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter; the lower one is slightly less thick than the upper one which is separated from the lower disc by a deep groove. From the centre raises a pea-like knob, giving the stone Linga a total height of one inch. The knob is called 'bin' or 'arrow', the upper disc *jalhari*, i.e. water-carrier (grooved to carry off the ablutions poured over the central knob); it is also called *pīṭh* 'seat' or *pīṭhak* 'little seat'. Over the Linga, to protect it all through the wearer's life, is plastered a durable thick black paste made of cowdung ashes, clay, marking-nut juice and some suitable oil. This coating is called *kānṭhi* or *kānta* 'covering'; it hides the actual shape of the enclosed Linga, so that it forms a smooth, black, slightly truncated cone, not unlike a dark betel-nut about an inch high and narrowing from $\frac{3}{4}$ inch at the base to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch across the top.

The Linga is worn either around the wrist, the arm from the left shoulder like a sacred thread, or in the waist band; but it should never be worn below the navel. It is worn tied round by a ribbon or in a silver casket fastened by a silver chain. It is as a rule never shown to anyone who does not wear it himself.

The cabalistic interpretation of Linga-wearing is that the Linga represents the wearer's soul which is not different from the divinity, Śiva. Or, to put it differently; the Iṣṭalinga is not only an image (*pratīka*) of Śiva but *is* Śiva himself, and the worship (*upāsanā*) performed by the devotee daily is in fact the worship of the true Self of the worshipper which is identical with Śiva. Thus the worshipper—a microcosmic image of the macrocosmic Soul—is brought so to say face to face with Paraśiva, the object of worship. This worship is therefore termed *ahamgrahopāsanā*, i.e. 'worship which grasps the Self'.

In practice, the Linga should be taken thrice per day, washed, rubbed with sacred ashes, worshipped, a string of *rudrākṣa* beads wound round it, flowers poured over it. While the Linga is thus placed on the palm of the left hand of the devotee it should not only be the object of (relatively simple) ritual worship but also an object of meditation (*dhyāna*). The devotee should meditate on the Iṣṭalinga as on his own Self identical with Śiva, i.e. the Supreme Brahman—the identity being now temporarily veiled and lost.

A person—man or woman—keeps the same Iṣṭalinga throughout life. After death, it is taken out of the case, tied round the neck or arm of the corpse and buried with it.

In theory, nothing can pollute a Linga; hence, nothing can really pollute the Linga-bearer.

The Vīraśaiva's greatest aspiration is to be in total union with the Linga.

Lord ! Keep me in the Linga like fire in the stone.
Keep me in the Linga like the wind embraces the scent.

Oh, Nāginātha dear to Rēkaṇṇa,
keep me in the Linga just as the oil is hidden
in the light of the lamp.

It is the innermost place of residence
in you.

The critical stage of wearing of the Linga involves also the worship of the Guru and the Jangama, and the wearing of *vibhūti* or sacred ash, of *rudrākṣa* beads as rosary, partaking in *prasāda* or consecrated food, washing with *pādōdaka* or holy

water, and reciting the *mantra* (the five-syllabled sacred formula with *Om*).

The Guru or spiritual guide is considered superior to even the parents since he is the cause of the spiritual birth; since he leads the individual to unity with Śiva he is considered to be worthy of more reverence than Śiva himself. The Jangama is a traveling religious teacher, representing the community of saints; ideally he should be free and pure, celibate and without property; he is the 'dynamic' Linga, the moving Śiva. The *pādōdaka* means, literally, the water from the feet of the Guru; hence it signifies 'holy water' in general, mostly the water of the Linga worn by the Guru and the Jangama, imbibed by the devotee as a mark of his/her devotion. If sipped, it is believed to purify body and mind. The *prasāda* or 'favour' is consecrated food, sanctified by the touch of the Guru or Jangama. Ideally, *pādōdaka* and *prasāda* unite the lay devotees through commensality and companionship with each other and with their Gurus and Jangamas. In practice, *prasāda* (usually fruit or other strictly vegetarian simple food) is food offered by the devotee to his Guru who hands it back to the devotee making it thus holy. At the time of the Lingapūjā (Linga worship), the Guru pours a small quantity of *pādōdaka* water which he himself had given over his Linga and sips it; the devotee then pours a small quantity of the remaining holy water over his Linga and sips it. This is a symbol of unity, of the ultimate non-distinctness of the Linga, the Guru and the devotee.

Prasāda was probably introduced to symbolize and demonstrate social equality and common brotherhood. It is partaken of by the Guru and the devotees (whatever may be their vocation in life, rank, occupation or sex) in the same place at the same time. This is indeed a strong departure from normative Hinduism where commensality is one of the crucial issues in the purity-pollution sphere.

'I wear the holy ash at every step/And wash off the triple impurity', says Siddhalingēśvara. It is also considered the 'ash of Union', the 'ash of Consciousness', and an ash-bath is regarded as more effective than 'billion baths in the holy Ganga'. *Vibhūti* or sacred ash (prepared according to elaborate rules from cow-

dung) symbolizes inner intuition. The original meaning of the term is 'great prosperity'.

One must also wear upon one's body the *rudrākṣa* beads 'which are Śiva's ornaments', for

The Śiva-devotee, who has
the holy ash upon his brow,
the *rudrākṣa* garland round his neck,
the Śiva *mantra* on his lips,
the Śiva Linga on himself,
is verily Śiva Himself.

These beads are in fact the berries of *Eleocarpus ganitrus* (a tree). They are of different size, of light brown to dark reddish-brown to almost black colour, and are strung into prayer beads and worn in the form of garlands round the neck, wrist or head. The name means 'the eyes of Rudra', and a legend tells us that they originated as Śiva's tears.

The devout Vīraśaiva knows only one prayer: the *mantra* or sacred formula of five syllables (*pañcākṣara*) which is the all-pervading 'mantra of all mantras' and should be recited at all times in any state; this Pañcākṣaramahāmantra is, of course,

Namaḥ Śivāya
"Obeisance to Śiva",

sometimes preceded or followed by the syllable *Om̐*.

These six are known as *āvaraṇa*'s or 'coverings, clothings, emblems' which distinguish Lingāyatās from any other community and prepare the devotee to enter the path of *śaṭsthala*, the six phases of spiritual progression.

The devotee is now ready; he may enter the first phase—the *bhaktasthala*, the affective stage, led by *bhakti* or total devotion to the Lord in the shape of the Linga. This stage implies a disciplined life, a spirit of disinterested service according to the principle of 'Work is Kailāsa (heaven)', aided by *kriyāśakti* or 'the power of action'. The ultimate aim of an individual Vīraśaiva may be rather precisely expressed, in psychological terms, by the verses found in Basava 854:

Freedom from greed and fear belongs,
O Lord of the Meeting Rivers,
to none else but your devotees
who are so dear to you.

Nirāśa nirbhaya, freedom from greed, freedom from fear. These two ever increasing, the devotee moves from *bhakti* to *niṣṭhe* or discipline. This phase, called *māhēśvara*, is the stage when the Guru must be of particular help, and the devotee, aided by *jñāna* or right knowledge, goes through various ordeals and temptations. It is thus the stage of endurance.

Through the strength of his faith, the devotee attains the grace of divine tranquility, and enters the *prasādi*-phase, the phase of *avadhāna* or receiving. All his acts are acts of devotion; he is 'absorbed in vigilance', and all things are offerings which he hands over to god.

In the next stage, *prāṇalingi*, receiving gives place to experiencing (*anubhava*). The worshipper, transformed into one who is devoted to 'the Linga within the breath', turns inward. 'My consciousness is Thine, Thy consciousness is mine, O Lord!' says Siddhalingēśvara. 'My soul is Thine, Thy soul is mine. My bliss is Thine, Thy bliss is mine, O Lord ! Between Thee and me, there is no gap at all'.

In the fifth stage (*śaraṇa*), the devotee is almost completely one with god; the periods of separation are brief; the individual suffers only like a loving woman who suffers her lover's temporary absence. His *bhakti* 'devotion' is now *ānanda* 'bliss'. Finally, he has shed completely the duality of Anga and Linga. Merging into the Mahālinga, he becomes consubstantially one with him.

He has reached Oneness in *aikyasthala*. There is no worship any more, devotion has been transformed into *samarasa*, sameness. 'The devotee has neither body nor soul; he is illusion-free, beyond knowledge or ignorance; he has no In or Out; no self, nor other than the self' (Siddhalinga 633).

Thus, the Vīraśaiva mysticism has evolved its own characteristic 'way' in six stages: affective, conative, cognitive, intuitive, executive and unitive. It is, though, necessary to stress that it

is believed that all the six stages can be achieved in each stage; that all schemes may dissolve and all stages may merge; that in any one *sthala* all other *sthalas* are inherent.

When the *aikya* stage has been truly and fully experienced, nothing more is left except the 'stage no-stage', the plane of *nirvayasthala*, where all other *sthalas* are transcended and only the ultimate depersonalization of the individual soul, beyond the cycle of birth and death, remains—like in Zen. And, like in Zen, 'the circle is closed'. The soul returns to the Divine Void from which it had originally emerged. 'It is all vain to speak of Consciousness, for what is called consciousness is void, and I became an utter, utter Void.' There is nothing to meditate upon; one is himself 'transformed into the taintless and immaculate Thing.'

There is none to seek or being sought,
no worshipper or worshipped one,
no god, no devotee.

There's neither name, nor namelessness.

Viraśaivism—as an object of Western (and Indian) academic interest (not to mention its more popular knowledge)—has suffered considerable neglect. More familiarity with it would undoubtedly open the way to a better understanding of Hinduism and India itself. There is one rather fundamental question which I would like to very briefly discuss, and offer my opinion about: Are the Viraśaivas a separatist movement or 'sect' that has broken away from Hinduism, a consciously reformist movement in the Western sense of Protestant Reformation (Basava has been called by Arthur Miles 'the Luther of India')—or should Viraśaivism be rather defined as representing a vigorous renaissance of the Hindu ethos from within? The first 'Protestant' view was expressed by R.E. Enthoven in his article on the Lingāyatas in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (Vol. 8, 1915, 69-75) and has since then been accepted by most Western scholars, and by some Indians, too (not all, though—e.g. S. Radhakrishnan refuted it vigorously). I am of a completely different opinion. There is nothing 'Puritan' or 'Protestant' in our sense about Viraśaivism. Unlike the Jains and the Buddhists, Viraśaivas respect the authority of the Vedas though they derive their religion

from the Āgamas. In this they agree with the vast majority of modern Hindus. Unlike many Indian Muslims or Pārsīs, but like the absolute majority of the Hindus, Viraśaivas are descendants of Indian Hindus, and not peoples coming from outside India. Like many Hindus, Viraśaivas worship one of the great gods of Hinduism, Śiva. In outlook, life-style customs, rites-de-passage, even rites and rituals of the Viraśaivas, there is nothing 'puritanical' or 'Protestant'. The entire Lingāyata ambience is, so to say, Hindu, Āgamic, and deeply rooted in the colourful Puranic mentality. Viraśaiva *vacanas* draw their symbols, metaphors, images, myths and legends from the 'pan-Indian pool of symbology' (Ramanujan). They have festivals and read Puranas which are in almost every feature Hindu. True, the Viraśaivas are—at least theoretically—outside the system of the four *varṇas* (basic social classes) and outside the system of the four *āśramas* (life stages). However, otherwise they are well within the basic tenets of Hindu religion, philosophy and view of life—quite unlike the Jains and Buddhists. I am happy that one of the most authoritative and well-informed pronouncements concerning this question comes from such reliable source as Dr. Shivamurthy Shivacharya, the head of the Sirigere *maṭh*, who writes (personal communication 24.9.1980): 'As for the question whether Viraśaivas are Hindus, I completely agree with what you have written in your letter of 27th June, i.e. Viraśaivas *are* Hindus well outside the *varṇāśramadharma* but within the framework of basic Hindu doctrines.'

ENVOY

It is of special urgency mixed with sad irony that a translation of the poems of Basavaṇṇa dedicated to the Lord of the Meeting Rivers is being published at this time. Kūḍala Sāngama, the Confluence of the two rivers, a place which had been holy for many centuries, submerged in waters for ever in June 1981 when the irrigational dam across the river Krishna at Narayanpur has been completed.

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